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THE NEW YORKER

APRIL 27, 2015

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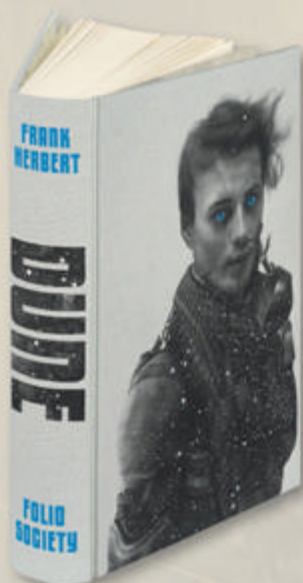
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THE MAIL

STILL TROUBLED

I read with interest Patrick Radden Keefe's article about the disappearance of Jean McConville and the violent history of the Irish Republican Army ("Where the Bodies Are Buried," March 16th). As an Irish citizen, I found Keefe's descriptions of the activities of Sinn Féin, the I.R.A.'s political party, during the past forty years to be painful reading. The lies and the sublimation of the "disappeared" seemed inevitable outcomes for a subjugated people who have sought self-determination. I grew up in the Republic in the seventies and eighties. My mother's father was a proud I.R.A. man who fought in the Irish Civil War and was a decorated prisoner of war. In our house, there was much sympathy for the plight of the Irish nationalist minority (mostly Catholic) in Northern Ireland, but, as middle-class citizens, we had little interest in the tactics of the Provisional I.R.A. We criticized the killing of civilians, soldiers, and prison guards. Hunger strikers got little recognition for their sacrifice; the "old I.R.A." would never have stooped to such depravity, I was told. There is little doubt that Gerry Adams was an I.R.A. commander at one time, whatever he knows about the McConville murder. He has shed that baggage and become a democratic leader who may end up running the largest party in the country. I wonder if the Irish people, myself included, can accept this transformation.

*Colin P. Doherty
Dublin, Ireland*

As a resident of Northern Ireland, I was upset to read about someone like Gerry Adams—only one of many former I.R.A. members who have gone unpunished—enjoying the status of a politician, despite the fact that "even the dogs in the street," as we like to say, know he has a lot of blood on his hands. Keefe's article is one that no publication here would dare to print, for fear of the consequences. I was

brought up to believe that it's wrong to bomb, shoot, and intimidate members of one's own community, no matter what their religion is, and it's disturbing to be reminded that so many people here think that the trail of death that Adams and his ilk (on both sides of the divide) leave in their wake is something to glorify. A country that honors and votes into power people who take pride in their history of indiscriminate murder is not one in which I want to live.

*G. Crawford
County Armagh, Northern Ireland*

Keefe's piece contains an important element of the Irish problem. Writing about the Unionist marches in Belfast, Keefe says that "Catholic areas were decked out with the Irish tricolor, and with Palestinian flags—a sign of solidarity and a signal that, even now, many Republicans in the north consider themselves an occupied people." That is the point: they *are* occupied. In my view, the people of Northern Ireland can be considered in much the same way as the Palestinians, who are battling Israel over control of territory. These residents of Ireland will continue to think of themselves as being occupied until the British are gone from the north for good. At some point, I hope, Britain will have to do the right thing in Ireland, as France did in Algeria, in 1962: recognize the morally and politically indefensible nature of its occupation of Irish soil, back away, and permit the population of Ireland to choose its own national identity. Until that happens, the notion of "even now" will remain embedded in the hearts and minds of Irish people, like me.

*James Murphy
Providence Forge, Va.*

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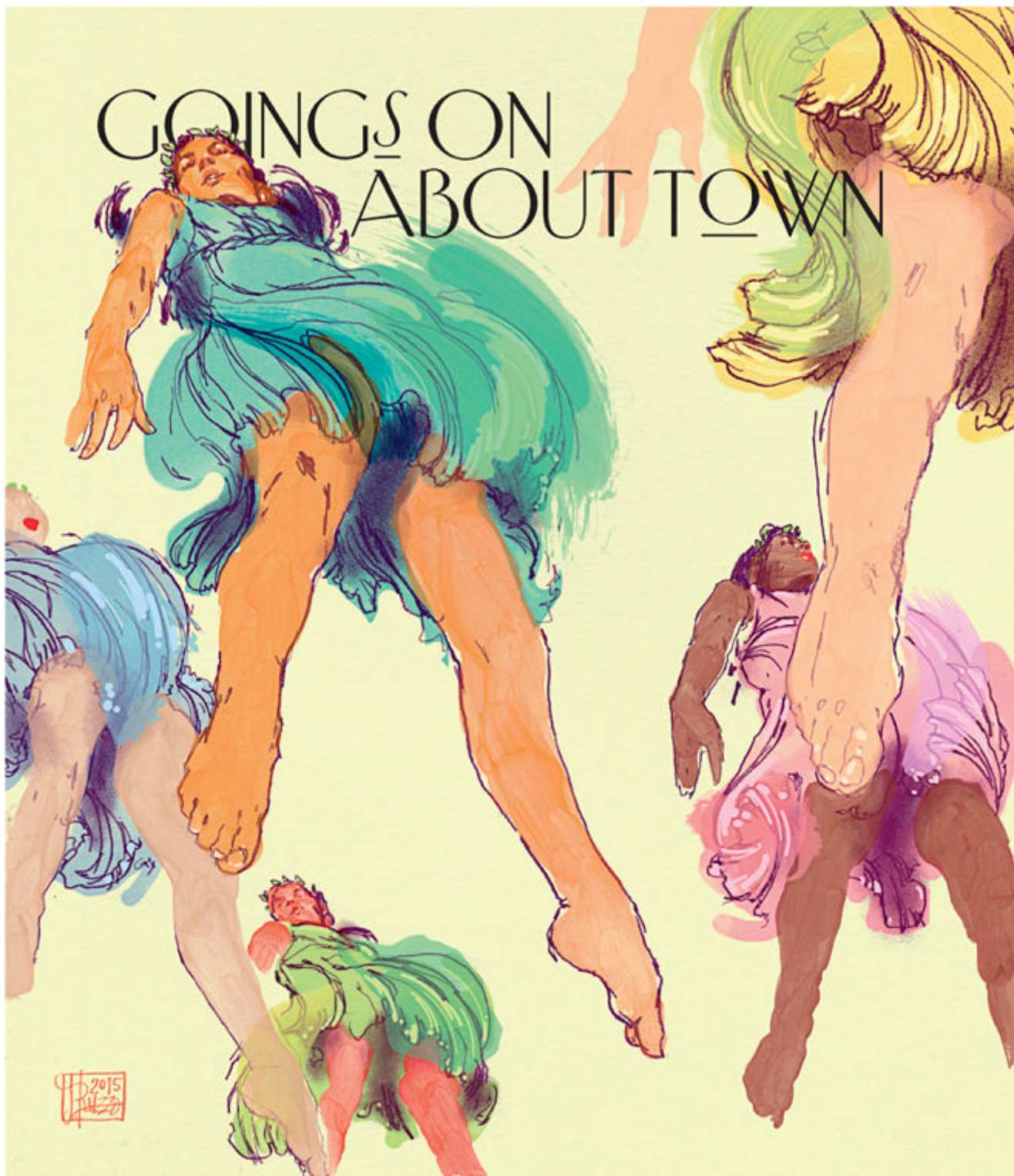
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



APRIL 2015 WEDNESDAY 22ND THURSDAY 23RD FRIDAY 24TH SATURDAY 25TH SUNDAY 26TH MONDAY 27TH TUESDAY 28TH

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP returns to BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House for the first time in three years, April 22-26. "Spring, Spring, Spring" is Morris's 2013 interpretation of Stravinsky's revolutionary "Le Sacre du Printemps." He's done away with the scenario—sacrificial virgins aren't his thing—and instead features pure, full-bodied movement with hints of bacchanalian revelry. To make the music sound fresh, Morris chose a cleaned-up version by the jazz trio the Bad Plus, who will play in the pit. (Morris's credo is live music, always.) "Words," set to Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words"—get it?—uses a theatrical device from South Asian dance: a curtain conceals dancers as they enter and leave the stage. "Whelm," the one world premiere in the two programs, is a quartet set to two moody preludes and an étude by Debussy.

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'TIS PITY SHE'S A WHORE
The Duke on 42nd Street

THE VISIT
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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

The Belle of Belfast

The Irish Rep stages Nate Rufus Edelman's play, directed by Claudia Weill, in which a hard-living woman in war-torn Belfast seeks comfort from her parish priest. In previews. Opens April 23. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-727-2737.)

Early Shaker Spirituals

The Wooster Group revives its piece based on an album of Shaker songs, directed by Kate Valk. With Cynthia Hedstrom, Elizabeth LeCompte, Frances McDormand, and Suzzu Roche. Opens April 23. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 29 Jay St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

Forever

Dael Orlandersmith performs a semiautobiographical solo show, directed by Neel Keller, inspired by her pilgrimage to the Père Lachaise cemetery, in Paris. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-279-4200.)

The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek

Athol Fugard wrote and directs this play, about a black farm laborer in apartheid-era South Africa who has painted an entire garden on rocks. In previews. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

Speakeasy Dollhouse: Ziegfeld's Midnight Frolic

Cynthia von Buhler wrote and directs this immersive work, which transforms a former Broadway house into a lavish Jazz Age milieu to tell the story of a Ziegfeld girl's death by poisoning. In previews. Opens April 26. (Liberty, 234 W. 42nd St. 866-811-4111.)

Two Gentlemen of Verona

Theatre for a New Audience presents Fiasco Theatre's version of the Shakespeare comedy, directed by Jessie Austrian and Ben Steinfield. Previews begin April 24. (Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

NOW PLAYING

An American in Paris

Christopher Wheeldon, who is English and was trained in classical ballet, was not a natural choice to direct a quintessentially American show, with an American story and, above all, an American score, featuring George Gershwin's famous 1928 tone poem, together with his wonderful, jazzy songs. The book, by Craig Lucas, gives us basically the same plot as the 1951 movie: Jerry (Robert Fairchild) is a painter who fought in France during the war and fell so much in love with Paris that he couldn't bear to leave when the conflict was over. Then he meets a French girl, Lise

(Leanne Cope), and instantly loses his heart. As well as adding sorrow to the story, Wheeldon has given it clarity. On the whole, the show is tasteful, witty, sophisticated, decent-hearted—even lovely, often—and a little mild, a little pale. It is not so much something as a meditation on something. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/20/15.) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 877-250-2929.)

Buzzer

Tracey Scott Wilson's play, directed by Anne Kauffman, tells the story of Jackson (Grantham Coleman), an upwardly mobile black lawyer, whose girlfriend, Suzy (Tessa Ferrer), a moralizing white schoolteacher, sleeps with Jackson's old school friend Don (Michael Stahl-David), an intermittently sober junkie, also white. Jackson takes Don in, partly out of loyalty but also out of guilt: as hard as he's worked for his success, he can't believe it—or own it. Suzy is a good girl who wants to be bad, and we lose interest in her early on, because of Ferrer's lack of vocal control. But, weirdly, the person Wilson leaves deepest in the dramaturgical dust is Jackson. The guilt he feels about catapulting himself past his humble beginnings should make him an amazingly riven character. But Wilson doesn't get beyond the confines of his race to explode the intricacies of his heart. (4/20/15) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through April 26.)

Ghosts

The director Richard Eyre has adapted Ibsen's profound play about familial history and the weight of the past into a ninety-minute piece that falls short of what made Ibsen great: all that thickness of language and thought that contributed to his masterworks' falling somewhere between naturalistic dramas and essays. In this episodic, empty production, Lesley Manville plays Helene Alving, a well-off widow whose son, Oswald (Billy Howle), is a painter who has just returned from Paris. Suffering from violent headaches, Oswald is the physical embodiment of his late father's various debaucheries, while Helene lives in the bitterness of the past and certain stunted desires. Her passion for an old friend, Pastor Manders (Will Keen), only adds to the tension, but there is so much overacting, particularly Keen's, that everything is reduced to soap opera—without the cheap thrills. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

Gigi

Vincente Minnelli, who directed the 1958 musical-film version of Colette's 1944 novella, about a female innocent in Belle Époque Paris who's essentially being pimped out to a moneyed playboy by two middle-aged female relatives, did not forsake Colette's tone of sorrow when he added Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay

Lerner's music and lyrics to the mix. Unfortunately, Eric Schaeffer, who has directed the stage version, thinks the champagne air that Gigi lives in is enough to intoxicate his audience. But how can we be distracted from the strangeness of Vanessa Hudgens's title performance, which seems too mincingly coquettish by half? Choreographed by Joshua Bergasse, the cast members move through a series of run-down-looking sets while giving the impression that they're annoyed by one another's presence. After a while, we become anesthetized to the action in an attempt to enjoy what we can of the score. (4/20/15) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.)

Hamlet

Austin Pendleton sets his "Hamlet" amid the half-empty wineglasses and booze bottles left over from Gertrude and Claudius's wedding, and the entire production feels about as lethargic as an after-party that wound down a few drinks ago. Peter Sarsgaard stars, and he's a capable Hamlet—skittish, wily, and passive-aggressive—but he doesn't have much to play against. Lisa Joyce's Ophelia is doe-eyed and vacant, and Penelope Allen's Gertrude is a little dotty. There are hints of directorial choice: dead characters wander across the stage, and actors linger after their scenes, vaguely observing the action from white leather couches. Though Pendleton's storytelling is clear, this is a prosaic "Hamlet," with the ghost remaining stubbornly offstage and the climactic duel producing less a cascade of carnage than a series of dispiriting slumps. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111.)

Hand to God

The weird thing about this intermittently entertaining play, by Robert Askins, is that it purports to criticize right-wing Christianity while sharing some of its prejudices. Margery (Geneva Carr), the energetic single mother of a sullen youth named Jason (the brilliant Steven Boyer), is pursued by the smarmy Pastor Greg (Marc Kudisch), who works with her in an after-school arts program. There, Jason, along with Jessica (Sarah Stiles) and Timothy (Michael Oberholtzer), is encouraged to use hand puppets to act out Christian-based stories. But Jason's puppet, Tyrone, cannot be controlled. Blasphemous and hilarious, he says what Jason would never dream of saying. As Jason/Tyrone spews, Margery seems to be taken over by the Devil; she gives in to Timothy's lust. As usual, a woman's desires are painted as demonic, and she must be punished for them in the end. All this subtext spoils the production, but not Boyer's incredible talent. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Iowa

A teen-ager named Becca (Jill Shackson) comes home from school

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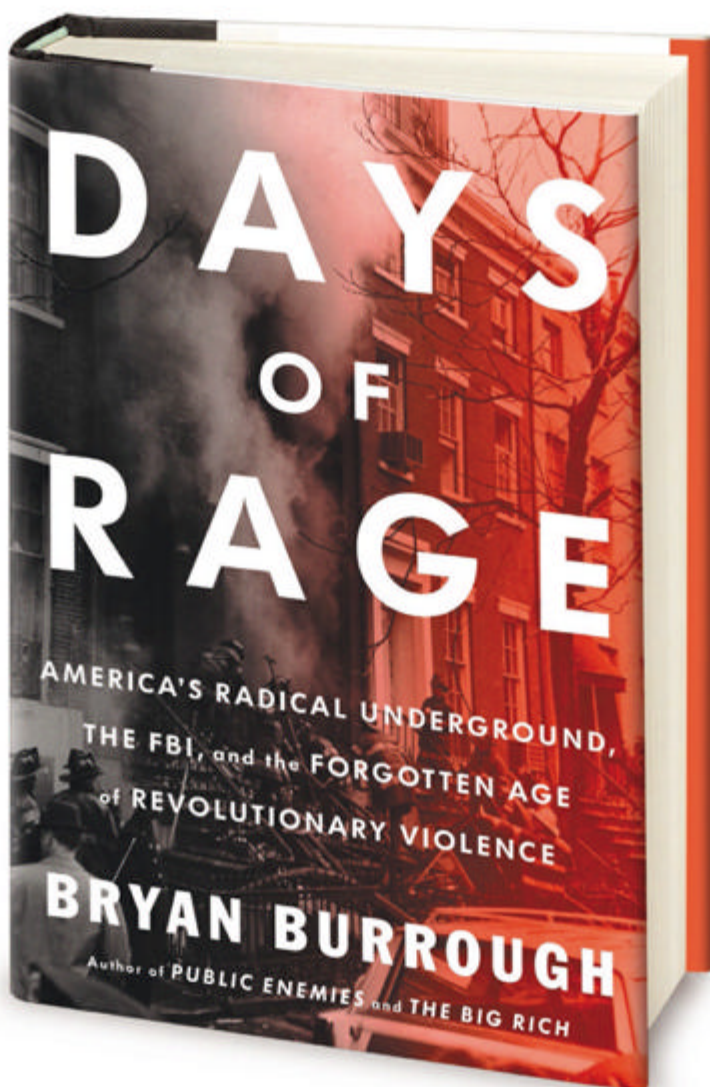
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to find that her scattered, champagne-swilling mom (Karyn Quackenbush) has accepted a marriage proposal via Facebook. They're moving to Ohio. Or possibly Iowa. Then a pony canters across the stage, and someone sings a sad song about coastal erosion. A black Nancy Drew also appears. And a small child. The tender, absurdist, and bemusing musical, by the playwright Jenny Schwartz and the composer Todd Almond, unspools in linear fashion only if you allow for some very squiggly lines. Schwartz has a wildly prolix, rattling style, and her passion for wordplay borders on compulsion. Almond specializes in simple, tuneful melodies that draw on the rhythms of informal speech. The totality, as directed by Ken Rus

Schmoll, is mostly confounding. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Skylight

In David Hare's play, directed by Stephen Daldry, Kyra Hollis (Carey Mulligan) is a young woman living in a down-at-heel flat in North London. The time is the early nineteen-nineties, and the world is sharply divided between haves and have-nots. Kyra was the lover of a successful older married man named Tom Sergeant (Bill Nighy), who shows up in a bid to reclaim her. Mulligan is an actress of intention, meaning that she often plays her characters without seeming to understand why they're reacting as they are, and yet we can see the intelligence

in their eyes. But sometimes, when Mulligan has too much to say, she is reduced to the unenviable position of being Hare's female mouthpiece. Mulligan is interested in the small spaces—the private moments—of existence; Nighy's Tom, by contrast, likes watching himself. It's his show, and he wants us to know it's his show. (4/20/15) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Wolf Hall: Parts One & Two

Steeped in its venerable tradition of enunciation and spectacle, the Royal Shakespeare Company is one of those troupes that keep theatre firmly rooted in nineteenth-century bourgeois standards. This conservative vision contributes to both the pleasure and the dullness of Jeremy

Herrin's production, adapted by Mike Poulton from Hilary Mantel's best-selling novels. The acting is all of a piece—perfectly nice, nothing you would confuse with genius—in this nearly six-hour work, set, for the most part, in King Henry VIII's court. Mantel's interest in the ways that consciousness—specifically, religious consciousness—rubs up against the barbarism that made England a world power is explored in scenes that are short and expedient but often humorless. The set and costume designer, Christopher Oram, only suggests the period's dirty opulence, and, while we are relieved of too many heaving bosoms and much lancing, they are present just the same. (4/20/15) (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

For the last new production of the season, the director David McVicar turns opera's most famous double bill into an indictment of the uncomplicated sense of entitlement that men can feel toward women. His goals may be admirable, but his abstract, relentlessly grim staging of Mascagni's "*Cavalleria Rusticana*" compels Eva-Maria Westbroek (Santuzza), Marcelo Álvarez (Turiddu), and George Gagnidze (Alfio) to substitute stentorian vocalism for dramatic insight. Things improve markedly with Leoncavallo's "*Pagliacci*," lighter on its feet in a breezy, recognizably nineteen-forties setting, thanks in no small part to the soprano Patricia Racette, who brings much needed emotional depth and plenty of star power to the role of the free-spirited Nedda. The conductor, Fabio Luisi, emphasizes the fateful forces lurking below the ingratiating lyricism of each composer's score. (April 25 at 12:30.) • **Also playing:** The final performances of "*Don Carlo*," conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin and featuring a cast of impressive Verdians that includes Ferruccio Furlanetto (a chillingly authoritarian Philip II), Dmitri Hvorostovsky,

Yonghoon Lee, and Barbara Frittoli. (April 22 and April 25 at 7. Luca Salsi replaces Hvorostovsky in the first performance.) • The real draw in David Alden's interpretively fussy but visually attractive production of Verdi's "*Un Ballo in Maschera*" is the crack team of soloists that the Met has assembled for the task: Dolora Zajick, Piotr Beczala, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and Sondra Radvanovsky, who has carved out quite a niche for herself as a Verdi soprano with a ringing, pliable voice and a stage-filling presence. James Levine, a lauded interpreter of the composer, conducts. (April 23 and April 28 at 7:30.) • Susan Stroman's new production of "*The Merry Widow*," which scored at best a succès d'estime at its première, in December, with Renée Fleming, will get a new lease on life when Susan Graham, a confident exponent of the title role, heads the cast. Among the other new arrivals are Rod Gilfry (as Danilo), Stephen Costello, and Andriana Chuchman; Fabio Luisi, the company's principal conductor, is in the pit. (April 24 and April 27 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

Juilliard Opera:

"Le Nozze di Figaro"

What better way to wind up a spring season than with Mozart's immortal comedy? Gary Thor Wedow, formerly of City Opera, paces a student cast in a production directed by Stephen Wadsworth. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. events.juilliard.edu. April 24 and April 28 at 7:30 and April 26 at 2.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Orchestra of St. Luke's

Pablo Heras-Casado, the young Spanish maestro who serves the orchestra as principal conductor, excels equally in music old and new. He joins a celebrated guest, the cellist Alisa

Weilerstein, in a program featuring music by Stravinsky, Shostakovich (the Cello Concerto No. 2, a more introspective work than the fiery First), and Beethoven (the Fifth Symphony). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 23 at 8.)

New World Symphony

Two pathbreaking performers, the violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter and the conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, are featured in this program with the outstanding young-professionals orchestra that Thomas has led in Miami since 1987. Mutter is out front in two works, Berg's deeply moving Violin Concerto and Norbert Moret's "En Rêve," written for her in 1988; the concert begins with music by Schubert and concludes with Debussy's "La Mer." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 28 at 8.)

RECITALS

Dorothea Röschmann and Mitsuko Uchida

No finer tribute to the German soprano's artistry could be made than for her to be joined in recital by Uchida, one of the most illustrious pianists of our time. The program is straightforward: Schumann's Eichendorff "Liederkreis" (Op. 39) and "Frauenliebe und -leben," with Berg's "Seven Early Songs" in between. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 22 at 8.)

Miller Theatre: Anna Clyne

The young British-born composer, currently in residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, writes music in which moods of whimsy and drama—along with the styles of minimalism and modernism—creatively collide. This season, Miller's "Composer Portrait" series concludes with a concert devoted to her works (including "Rapture" and "1987"), performed by the estimable Ensemble Signal and its conductor,

Brad Lubman. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. April 23 at 8.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: "An Evening with Brahms"

Chamber music's most enduring composer gets another evening with the Society, with the Sitkovetsky Trio joining the violinist Cho-Liang Lin and other musicians in a program that offers the Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano, the Piano Trio in C Minor, Op. 101, and the String Sextet No. 2 in G Major. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. April 24 at 7:30.)

Richard Goode

The venerable American pianist, having joined several fine younger colleagues in evenings of song and chamber music, finishes his winter-spring series with a solo recital, full of old favorites from the repertory—music by Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms (the Piano Pieces, Op. 76), Debussy ("Children's Corner"), and Schumann. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 24 at 8.)

"The Night Dances"

Benjamin Britten's Three Suites for Cello have always attracted stars. Written for the composer's close colleague Mstislav Rostropovich, the paramount soloist of his time, they have joined Bach's Six Suites in the tiny pantheon of standard-repertoire pieces for unaccompanied cello. The Suites' latest champions are the cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton and the actress Charlotte Rampling, who offer a one-hour show at the Park Avenue Armory's Board of Officers Room which combines excerpts from the Second and Third Suites with dramatic recitations of poems by Sylvia Plath (including "Ariel" and "Lady Lazarus"). (Park Ave. at 66th St. armoryonpark.org. April 22-23 at 7:30, April 24-25 at 8, and April 26 at 3.)



DISAPPEARING ACT

Balanchine's "Agon" then and now.

DANCE, THEY SAY, is the art that vanishes, but it is now vanishing more slowly. Time was, people would give talks, even write books, about famous dances on the basis of memory or, worse, without ever having seen the piece, but just trusting what someone else had said. A film or videotape might exist, but you'd have to go to a special library, where the staff would often look at you as if you were there to steal something. There were pirated tapes, and tapes dubbed in libraries after hours by people on tiptoe. But to have access to such contraband you needed connections. Once, I had to go out of town to give a talk on Balanchine's great Stravinsky ballet "Agon." Years before, I had seen a tape of a 1960 performance on Canadian television—a precious record, because it featured the original cast, Arthur Mitchell and Diana Adams, in the pas de deux—but when I asked people I knew if they had the tape they all looked flustered and said no. Finally, a friend appeared at my door, gave me an unmarked envelope, and said that if I ever told anyone where I had got the tape her life wouldn't be worth a plug nickel. Today, if you want that recording, all you have to do is go into a store and ask for Volume 2 of Video Artists International's series "Balanchine: New York City Ballet in Montreal."

Arthur Mitchell has said that when he and Adams first performed the "Agon" duet,



DANCE

it looked different from today's renditions. For dancers of that period, the steps were very difficult, he said, and Adams was afraid that she wouldn't be able to do them. This made her seem vulnerable. She might also have been nervous about the duet's sexual frankness. In a lift, she goes into a front-facing split that I doubt had ever been seen on a ballet stage before. But combined with this bluntness was a strange, hushed tenderness. In 1956, Balanchine's wife, Tanaquil Le Clercq—who, with Adams, was his lead ballerina—was stricken with polio. He left the company for a year, to stay by her side. He spent hours doing physical therapy with her. When he returned to N.Y.C.B., he made "Agon," in which Mitchell often takes Adams's feet and legs in his hands, guiding them, placing them. The duet, then, was a strange package of fear and intimacy and eroticism, and all this was made more daring—or in 1957 it was—by the fact that Mitchell is black and Adams was white.

After looking at the DVD, buy a ticket to one of N.Y.C.B.'s performances of "Agon" this season (April 29, May 3, May 5, and May 9). In today's "Agon," I think, you will see less vulnerability and more boldness, more sex and less pain. Balanchine, by asking so much of his ballerinas, won for them great freedom and mastery, but, some nights, it seems that they traded something—shading, poignance—in the process.

—Joan Acocella

New York City Ballet

The new season progresses from the cool idealism of Balanchine's "black-and-white" ballets, so called because they are performed in leotards and tights on a bare stage, to the lush fairyland of his "Midsummer Night's Dream," in early June. Along the way, the company will perform Peter Martins's 1985 staging of August Bournonville's "La Sylphide" for the first time. It shares an evening with "Bournonville Divertissements," a confection of the choreographer's highlights concocted in 1977 by a fellow-Dane, the noted teacher Stanley Williams. Opening night consists of a mixed Balanchine bill. • April 28 at 7:30: "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Concerto Barocco," "Episodes," and "The Four Temperaments." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through June 7.)

"Rhythm in Motion"

The American Tap Dance Foundation's annual samplers of short

new works are generally a mixed bag, indiscriminately mingling the amateurish with the thrillingly innovative. Judging from the lineups, that pattern looks likely to hold for this year's two programs, with such high-calibre participants as Jason Samuels Smith, Derick K. Grant, Kazu Kumagai, and Michelle Dorrance pushing the envelope amid lesser practitioners. (Theatre at the 14th Street Y, 344 E. 14th St. 212-780-0800. April 22-26.)

Michelle Boulé

As a dancer, Boulé has worked with everyone from Deborah Hay to Miguel Gutierrez; she is still finding her way as a choreographer. Her new evening-length trio, "White," uses concepts from physics and BioGeometry—a patented theory that delves into "the energy of shapes"—as a starting point. The music is by Chris Seeds; costumes are by the peripatetic Reid Bartelme. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church

In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. April 23-25.)

Emily Johnson/Catalyst

The two previous installments of Johnson's trilogy, which draws upon her Yupik Eskimo heritage, started with the intimate storytelling of "The Thank-You Bar" and moved on to the lurching tone of "Niicugni." "Shore," directed by Ain Gordon, is even larger and more diffuse, incorporating a choir and ecstatic dancing. The performance at New York Live Arts begins at a basketball court around the corner. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 23-25.)

"Dancing the Gods"

This annual festival of Indian dance, presented by the World Music Institute, is always an educative delight. On Saturday, Rama Vaidyanathan, a bharata-natyam dancer of exceptional clarity, returns with her daughter Dakshina in a program exploring

various dualities. On Sunday, the kathak guru Kumudini Lakhia is honored by two of her students: Prashant Shah, dancing in rhythmic conversation with a tabla player, and Parul Shah, who presents a contemporary trio set to tabla and cello. (N.Y.U. Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 888-611-8183. April 25-26.)

The D.R.E.A.M. Ring

For those who missed "FLEXN," last month, in which street dancers flailed in the vastness of the Park Avenue Armory, or for those who want to see those dancers again (and without the unhelpful direction of Peter Sellars), here's a chance to catch two dozen practitioners of flex, led by Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray, in something closer to their natural habitat: two-on-two battles like those they stage in their Brooklyn neighborhoods. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 26.)



MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Museum of Modern Art

"One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series and Other Visions of the Great Movement North"

In 1993, seven years before his death, at the age of eighty-two, Jacob Lawrence recast the title and most of the captions of a stunning suite of sixty small paintings that he had made in 1941. The pictures, in milk-based casein tempera on hardboard, detailed the exodus—beginning during the First World War—of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North. The original title, "The Migration of the Negro," became "The Migration Series." The prolix captions were condensed and clarified, with only five of them left unedited. Art historians quail at alterations of canonical works, even by their creators. But Lawrence wasn't working for art history, even if he was making it. He wanted to change the world. This profoundly moving show—all sixty paintings and contemporaneous works by other artists, photographers, musicians, and writers—stirs reflection on the character and the relative success of that aim. Two impressions stand out. One is the terrifying obstinacy of racial injustice on the eve of the Second World War. The other is the moral grit that was needed to overcome it. In context, "Migration" appears as a hinge of the national consciousness: inward to the

untold history of African-Americans and outward to the enlightenment of the wide world. It would not have worked were it not superb art, but it is. Through Sept. 7.

Brooklyn Museum

"Basquiat: The Unknown Notebooks"

"I was cursed from birth," reads one of the more than a hundred and fifty sheets on display, excised from the notebooks of Boerum Hill's most famous artistic son. Arrayed like relics, the pages and pages of scribbled notes, written in blocky caps with his trademark uncrossed "E"s, serve more to burnish the profitable legend of Basquiat than to clarify his career, and viewers resistant to the artist's mystique may find this show uninspired. (The curator, Dieter Buehler, also organized the hagiographic Basquiat retrospective now up at Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario.) The notebooks reaffirm, however, that Basquiat's greatest innovation may have been his poetically disjunctive lists, which have roots not only in graffiti but also in Dada; a collage from 1980, when the artist was twenty, features a fractured Marcel Duchamp. And a twenty-eight-sheet drawing with a cracked head at its center gains most of its power from the percussive texts that frame it: invocations of Louis XVI and Robespierre, of the slave trade, of Crunch Berries cereal. Through Aug. 23.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Ken Kitano / Tomoko Sawada

Two Japanese photographers take very different approaches to portraiture and the construction of identity. Working in Indonesia, Bangladesh, and other sites in Asia, Kitano photographs similar subjects (women in burkas, men in uniform) to create striking aggregate portraits: one face emerging from many. The multilayered effect is haunting: the dominant figure is surrounded by a host of fainter faces, which hover like apparitions in spirit photographs. Like Cindy Sherman, Sawada uses herself to explore ideas of sameness and difference. Her grids of little mug-shot-like I.D. pictures, each a variation on the one that precedes it, are clever but familiar comments on conformity. Through April 25. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Lutz Bacher

The ever-devilish pseudonymous artist (who declines to reveal her real name) was a fixture on the Bay Area scene for many years, but this exhibition, by turns funny and moving, celebrates her recent move to Manhattan with winks at two artistic forebears. The show's title, "For the People of New York City," is nearly identical to a famous painting series by the minimalist Blinky Palermo (Bacher replaces his "To" with a "For"), while its central work revisits Andy Warhol's iconic black-and-white film of the Empire State Building, which Bacher filmed in color; projected onto multiple pieces of Plexiglas, it fills the room with blurry reflections, like a portrait of a collective memory. In the gallery's eighth-floor space is a pile of thousands of plaster-cast remnants that evokes

an ossuary, distressingly reminiscent of a certain September day in 2001. Through May 9. (Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)

Philip-Lorca diCorcia

The New York photographer's "East of Eden" series, started in 2008 and still in progress, includes some of his most ambitious and least personal work. The big landscapes and interiors are as airless as dioramas; each fraught, suspended moment is weighed down with the unearned significance of titles like "After the Fall," "Genesis," and "Epiphany" (the last is a picture of an upside-down pole dancer). "Cain and Abel" is an anonymous interior with a faceless, middle-aged gay couple embracing on a bed under the watchful gaze of a naked, pregnant woman. DiCorcia's parched Western landscapes could not be more alarmingly timely, but his pretensions to deeper meaning feel old-fashioned. Through May 2. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

Joan Semmel

The New York painter abandoned abstraction in the mid-seventies for intensely colored, proudly frank portraits of naked bodies—often her own, and often seen in flagrante. As part of this five-decade mini-retrospective, Semmel's paintings of a couple against a hot-yellow background, or of her own flesh seen from an unflattering downward angle, reclaim the female nude from its usual objectified role in Western painting. There's less boldness in her more recent works, unfortunately, whose conventional viewpoints and cropping sap her art of its earlier force. Aging deserves the full attention of a painter of such talent. Through May 16. (Gray, 508 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636.)



MOVIES

NOW PLAYING

About Elly

A group of Iranian friends, most of them married with small children, gather for a weekend by the sea. The mood is buoyant and blithe, until fate floods in; after that, the companions begin to quarrel. To make matters worse, no one is even sure what exactly has occurred, and neither are we. Asghar Farhadi's absorbing and distressing film, from 2009, keeps compelling us to shift our ground as the camera glances from one character to the next and as errors and deceptions come to light. Farhadi, like so many leading filmmakers across the genres, puts women at the forefront of his drama; here, we get fine contributions from Taraneh Alidoosti as the Elly of the title, an enigma at the fringes of the action, and from Golshifteh Farahani as Sepideh, the one who takes the brunt of the blame—merry at first, then stricken to the core. In Farsi.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/13/15.) (In limited release.)

The Aviator's Wife

The protagonist of Éric Rohmer's wickedly ironic romance, from 1981, is François (Philippe Marlaud), a twenty-year-old law student in Paris, but the real star is the green-eyed monster. It strikes early one morning when François, who works nights sorting mail, heads toward the apartment of his girlfriend, Anne (Marie Rivière), and sees her leaving the building with her ex, Christian (Mathieu Carrière), a pilot. Later that day, the jealous François spots Christian at a café and follows him; in the course of this espionage, François meets Lucie (Anne-Laure Meury), who is inquisitive, insightful, flirtatious—and fifteen, ten years younger than Anne, a fact that he doesn't omit while challenging Anne on her presumed infidelity. Rohmer builds long scenes of erotically jousting dialectic into radiant dramatic action. François is caught between two women, one of them too warm and the other too cold, and the plot pivots on the question of who chooses whom—and whether anyone really has a choice. In astute, luminous jaunts through city streets and parks, Rohmer constructs an exquisite web of coincidences that he elevates into a sort of destiny. In French.—*Richard Brody* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; April 22 and April 26.)

Bell, Book and Candle

An erratic light comedy with a spellbinding wild streak, centered on occult rites, New York City at Christmastime, and a magical cat named Pyewacket. It's hard to resist Kim Novak, in slinky beatnik chic, as she bewitches a straight-arrow publisher played by James Stewart; she's part of a witch-and-warlock underground operating merrily in Greenwich Village. Among its other members, the booming Hermione Gingold and the furtively funny Elsa Lanchester are perfectly matched oddballs; so are the serenely addlepated Ernie Kovacs, as an authority on sorcery, and Jack Lemmon, as an ebulliently volatile young sorcerer. Stewart, playing the foil, deserves better material, but the fun quotient is high, and there's an undeniable frisson to the way the movie's magic subculture echoes the closeted gay world of the fifties: it's easy to view the Zodiac Club as a gay bar. Directed by Richard Quine. Released in 1958.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Cinématek; April 26.)

Clouds of Sils Maria

Years ago, the actress Maria Enders (Juliette Binoche), in one of her early triumphs, took the role of a dangerous young woman, Sigrid, with whom an older character named Helena becomes infatuated. Now she is asked to revisit the play on the London stage, this time as Helena, starring opposite Jo-Ann Ellis (Chloë Grace Moretz), who is widely, if unfairly, known as a Hollywood hell-raiser. Just to complicate matters, the playwright has recently died, and Maria, accompanied by her long-suffering assistant, Valentine (Kristen Stewart), goes to live in his house, in the Swiss mountains; they take hikes together and rehearse the lines—so often, and with such intensity, that we can't always tell where their conversations end and the fragments of the play begin. If all this sounds self-involved, it is, and there are times when Olivier Assayas's new film, wreathed with ruminations on what it means to act, and on the ties that bind acting to the rest of our lives, dangles close to preciousness. Yet Assayas summons an air of unmistakable mystery, leaving much unexplained and mixing intimate encounters with bright, screen-filling vistas; you feel, by the end, that the film has earned its right to high altitude. Another surprise: Stewart, against the odds,

shares center stage, and it is her character, rather than Binoche's, whose fate concerns us most.—*A.L.* (4/20/15) (In limited release.)

Ex Machina

A shy young man is flown by helicopter to the grand estate of a rich and strange recluse; that was the trigger for the plot of "Foxcatcher," and it happens again here, in Alex Garland's film. Here, the issue is artificial intelligence—the forging of a plausible robot with feelings, thoughts, and a mildly seductive dress sense. Her name is Ava (Alicia Vikander), and she is the creation of Nathan (Oscar Isaac), an Internet billionaire. He has asked Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), a coder from his company, to assess Ava in a series of interviews, but she hints darkly at other, less innocent schemes afoot; as to who is controlling whom, that is a question left dangling until the final minutes. Much of the film stays pensive and low-key, quivering less with excitement than with tremors of anxiety. You sometimes feel that the story is in lockdown, like the remote research facility where Nathan dwells, and you might start throwing stuff at the screen were it not for the presence of Vikander: a beautiful face attached to a head and body of fine metal skeins, glowing lights, and translucent walls where her flesh should be. The trickery is wondrous to behold, but, without her emotional intentness, we would be left watching digital life without breath. In all, Ava seems more human than the humans.—*A.L.* (4/13/15) (In wide release.)

Furious 7

This gleefully kinetic installment of the paramilitary-motors franchise pulls a deep bromantic strain from the real-life drama of its production—the death, midway through filming, of its co-star Paul Walker. He plays Brian, a vehicular warrior who is married to Mia (Jordana Brewster), the sister of his partner-in-arms, Dom (Vin Diesel). The partners—plus the martial artist Letty (Michelle Rodriguez), who is Dom's wife; the class clown Roman (Tyrese Gibson); and the tech wiz Tej (Ludacris)—mobilize again to combat a double-barrelled assault. The evil Deckard Shaw (Jason Statham) is trying to kill them, and his partner-in-terror, Jakande (Djimon Hounsou), has kidnapped a hacker, whose "God's eye" gizmo

OPENING

THE AGE OF ADALINE

Blake Lively stars in this romantic fantasy as a woman who, after an accident, becomes immortal and comes to find her privilege a burden. Directed by Lee Toland Krieger. Opening April 24. (In wide release.)

THE FORGER

John Travolta and Christopher Plummer star in this drama, as a father and son who team up to copy a painting by Monet and steal the original. Directed by Philip Martin. Opening April 24. (In limited release.)

LITTLE BOY

In this dramatic fantasy, an eight-year-old boy tries to end the Second World War in order to bring his father, a soldier, home. Directed by Alejandro Monteverde; starring Jakob Salvati, Emma Watson, and Kevin James. Opening April 24. (In wide release.)

MISERY LOVES COMEDY

Kevin Pollak directed this documentary, about the world of comedy, featuring Jimmy Fallon, Amy Schumer, Whoopi Goldberg, Judd Apatow, Lisa Kudrow, and Larry David. Opening April 24. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

Films by Charlie Chaplin. April 25 at 6: Short films, including "Shoulder Arms" (1918). • April 25 at 8: Short films, including "The Pilgrim" (1923). • April 26 at 5:45: "The Gold Rush" (1925/1942). • April 26 at 7:30: "City Lights" (1931).

BAM CINÉMATEK

"The Vertigo Effect." April 22 at 4:30 and 9: "Déjà Vu" (2006, Tony Scott). • April 22 at 7:15: "Side/Walk/Shuttle" (1991, Ernie Gehr) and "La Jetée" (1962, Chris Marker). • April 24 at 7:30: "The Joy of Life" (2015, Jenni Olson). • April 25 at 7 and 9:30: "Obsession" (1976, Brian De Palma). • April 26 at 2 and 7: "Sans Soleil" (1983, Marker). • April 26 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Bell, Book and Candle."

SAIGON IS FALLING

As North Vietnamese forces poured into South Vietnam in April 1975, it became clear that thousands of Vietnamese and their families allied with the U.S. would face harsh reprisals, imprisonment, and execution. The heroic effort to evacuate more than **5,000 Americans** and **77,000 South Vietnamese** is chronicled in the **Academy Award®-nominated documentary "Last Days in Vietnam,"** directed and produced by filmmaker **Rory Kennedy**. Follow the fast-moving progression of Saigon's final desperate hours on the map below—revealing moments of heroism, daring, and sacrifice.

TAN SON NHUT AIRPORT

⌚ 3:43AM | APRIL 29, 1975 | TAN SON NHUT AIRPORT



A LIFELINE CLOSED

Hundreds of South Vietnamese officials and their families are evacuated via clandestine "black ops" organized by **U.S. Army Capt. Stuart Herrington** and others. Tan Son Nhut Airport ceases to be a route of escape on April 29th, when it is shelled by North Vietnamese forces encircling Saigon.

⌚ 2:30PM | APRIL 29, 1975 | 22 GIA LONG STREET



ROOFTOP ESCAPE

This iconic image is not the American Embassy, but the apartment rooftop of the deputy C.I.A. Station Chief at 22 Gia Long Street—one of several designated pick-up spots around Saigon which were overrun by panicked South Vietnamese as word of the American evacuation spread through the city.

⌚ 11:00PM | APRIL 29, 1975 | U.S. EMBASSY



EMBASSY REFUGE

Washington presses for swift completion of evacuation. **U.S. Marine Corps Captain Gerald Berry**, a helicopter pilot, airlifts more than 300 people in 34 trips between the U.S. Embassy and waiting American ships at sea.

⌚ 4:45AM | APRIL 30, 1975 | U.S. EMBASSY



BROKEN PROMISES

U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin is evacuated, ending the airlift for all non-American citizens. Binh Pho was among 420 left behind. He was captured by the North Vietnamese and spent several years in a re-education camp. He eventually escaped and arrived in the United States in 1979.

⌚ 11:00AM | APRIL 30, 1975 | SOUTH CHINA SEA



FREEDOM'S ARMADA

Acting without permission from Washington, **Naval Captain Paul Jacobs**, **Richard Armitage**, South Vietnamese **Navy Captain Kiem Do**, and others organized a flotilla of ships carrying upwards of 30,000 South Vietnamese over 1,000 miles across the South China Sea to the Philippines.

SOUTH CHINA SEA
(20 MILES OFFSHORE)

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FILM FORUM

"Strictly Sturges." April 22 at 2:10, 5:30, and 8:50: "The Great Moment" (1944). • April 23 at 12:30: "Christmas in July" (1940). • April 23 at 2: "The Lady Eve" (1941). • April 23 at 4: "Sullivan's Travels" (1941). • April 23 at 9:50: "The Miracle of Morgan's Creek" (1944). • In revival. April 24-May 7 (call for showtimes): "Forbidden Games" (1952, René Clément). • The films of D. W. Griffith. April 27 at 7:50: "Isn't Life Wonderful."

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"Eric Rohmer's Comedies and Proverbs." April 22 at 6:50 and April 26 at 4:30: "The Aviator's Wife." • April 23 at 6:50 and April 26 at 2: "Boyfriends and Girlfriends" (1987). • April 26 at 6:50: "A Good Marriage" (1982). • April 22-30 (call for showtimes): "Full Moon in Paris" (1984).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

"Haute Couture on Film."

April 28 at 4 and 7:30: "Gloria."

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The films of Bruce LaBruce. April 23 at 7: "Gerontophilia" (2013). • April 24 at 7 and April 25 at 1:30: "No Skin Off My Ass" (1991). • April 25 at 7:30: "Super 8 1/2" (1994). • April 26 at 5 and April 27 at 4: "Pierrot Lunaire" (2014). • April 27 at 8 and April 28 at 4: "Hustler White" (1996).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

The films of Tsai Ming-Liang. April 24 at 7: "What Time Is It There?" (2001). • April 25 at 4:45: "Journey to the West." • April 25 at 7: "Stray Dogs" (2013). • April 26 at 3:30: "Past Present" (2013, Tiong Guan Saw). • April 26 at 6:30: "Goodbye, Dragon Inn" (2003).



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Peter Bogdanovich's "What's Up, Doc?," from 1972, in our digital edition and online.

can track them across the globe. The federal government—represented by Mr. Nobody (Kurt Russell)—kicks in some equipment, and the chase begins. Along the way, the heroes do the impossible with vertiginous style, blending NASCAR maneuvers with demolition-derby impact, special-forces exploits with acrobatic aplomb. The director, James Wan, sends cars airborne and seems himself to marvel at the results; the movie's real subject is the stunt work, but its stars' chemistry lends melody to its relentless beat. The wreckage of cities is just a backdrop for the thrill of hard-won victory and the familial bonding that results.—R.B. (In wide release.)

Gloria

In John Cassavetes's 1980 drama, the middle-aged, childless Gloria (Gena Rowlands) rescues the six-year-old Phil (John Adames) from the mobsters who have killed his family; she goes on the lam with him and brings his father's ledger of Mob accounts. Herself a gangster's ex-lover, she has a gun, knows how to use it, and doesn't hesitate to shoot her pursuers in broad daylight—and their number keeps growing. The plot is a paranoid endgame in which the Mafia, in the know about everything before it happens, is the instrument of fate and running from death is as absurd as waiting for it. Cassavetes's hard-nosed metaphysics is matched by the intimate ferocity of the odd couple; scenes of Phil's proud, vain defiance and Gloria's resentment could have been played, with the same dialogue, by Rowlands and an adult actor as the domestic combat of lovers. No other director married to his leading lady has ever filmed his star's face to such self-deprecating effect as did Cassavetes: the creases on Rowlands's forehead and the crags beneath her eyes betray her hard years with him. The demanding man likens himself to the defenseless boy; both are saved by this gloriously burdened woman who would kill for them.—R.B. (French Institute Alliance Française; April 28.)

Isn't Life Wonderful

Filming on location in 1924, D. W. Griffith dramatized, in the heat of the moment, the turmoil arising in Germany from runaway inflation and unhealed wartime traumas. The film is centered on three generations of a family of Polish refugees who settle in a ramshackle Berlin suburb; there, the family's foster daughter, Inga (Carol Dempster), and the war-wounded eldest son, Paul (Neil Hamilton), seek to overcome dire straits and marry. With a sure artistic hand, Griffith evokes his moral and visual themes—the fetid ferment of city life and the spiritual balm of the open country, infused by the pioneer spirit. Facing starvation, Paul cultivates a plot of wasteland and builds a little

homestead there—as if importing American frontier values into the rotting Old World. Griffith makes high drama of hyperinflation—Inga waits in a butcher-shop line with her bankroll and watches as the numbers on the shop's price list rise—and he films a plundering band of penniless workmen in pursuit of Paul and Inga's honeymoon hoard of potatoes like a Wild West chase, but with no cavalry in sight. Griffith foresaw, in the mob's harrowing menace, the coming storm. Silent.—R.B. (Film Forum; April 27.)

It Follows

The setting of David Robert Mitchell's film is Detroit, and he makes full use of its contrasts: placid suburban neighborhoods give way to the untenanted and the derelict. When the surface of life is so easily cracked, it comes as no surprise that horror, like disease, can worm its way in. So it is that a teen-age girl named Jay (Maika Monroe) inherits a nameless plague. After sex in a car, she finds herself stalked by one remorseless figure after another; she alone can see them, but they will wipe her out unless she can pass the curse on to somebody else, by carnal means. How you interpret this doomy state of affairs will depend on your response to Mitchell's narrative rhythms; in between the frights that jump out at irregular intervals, he lets the action slide into anomie, as the heroine and her friends, one of whom keeps quoting Dostoyevsky, drift through their bored and all but adultless days. Violent extinction, in such a light, becomes just one of those things.—A.L. (3/16/15) (In limited release.)

Journey to the West

The Taiwan-based director Tsai Ming-Liang's ravishing conceptual film achieves a rare blend of sensuous delight and documentary specificity. It opens with a cutaneous closeup of a face that dominates the screen like a landscape: the face of the actor Denis Lavant, the fierce icon of modern French cinema, whose breath fills the soundtrack like the wind. His virtual companion, a red-robed monk, moves in self-imposed slow motion through a grottolike darkness and laboriously enters the world at large. In a balletic long take, the monk's descent of the steep staircase of a Marseilles subway station before bewildered passers-by becomes a Pilgrim's Progress away from the idea of progress. His infinitesimally sublimated action passes to a busy street in the city, in front of a throng of skeptical café patrons and dashing urbanites. Tsai's radical vision, challenging basic ideas of cultural politics and economic choices, turns the world as we know it upside down.—R.B. (Museum of the Moving Image; April 25.)

True Story

Jonah Hill, the go-to intellectual nerd with swagger, takes that title and runs with it in this intermittently gripping yet insubstantial docudrama, directed by Rupert Goold, based on Michael Finkel's book of the same title. Finkel, a freelance journalist, was found to have created a composite character in a report for the *New York Times* and, in disgrace, retreated to rural Montana. There, he learned that a prisoner named Christian Longo, charged with killing his wife and children, had been using Finkel's name as an alias while on the lam. Contacting Longo in jail, Finkel decided to write a book telling Longo's story—and his own. Longo, eager for his story to be published, deluged Finkel with letters and drawings and regaled him with talk in the prison visitors' room, in the hope of aiding his own defense. Hill, in the role of Finkel, and James Franco, portraying Longo, play the cat-and-mouse game to the hilt. With the pent-up carnality of his coruscating verbal intelligence, Hill suggests troubled realms that Goold's heavy-handed, literal direction can't reach—and there's hardly an effort to make sense of Longo. Filming a drama about the compromises and conventions of storytelling, Goold falls prey to them. He lacks the pulp verve and the symbolic imagination to illuminate or even convey the characters' mysteries. Felicity Jones plays Jill, Finkel's wife, in a woefully underdeveloped role.—R.B. (In limited release.)

While We're Young

In Noah Baumbach's new film, Ben Stiller and Naomi Watts play Josh and Cornelia, a married and childless couple who live in New York and worry that their life together, though comfortable, is no fun. Enter a younger couple, Jamie and Darby (Adam Driver and Amanda Seyfried), who take them up and teach them the error, or the frozen timidity, of their ways. The movie is at its simplest—and its best—when setting the tired style of the older folk against the pretensions of the hipsters. Needless to say, that insouciance begins to fall apart; we get a fussy plot, woven around the fact that both men make documentaries, as does Cornelia's father (Charles Grodin), and that Jamie is not quite the Zen-tinted joy-bringer that he seemed. The movie is tilted too far toward the male side of the generational clash; Seyfried is often confined to the wings of the action, and, when Watts is given space on center stage, she leaves us craving more. The film feels more blithe than earlier Baumbach projects, yet it's also his most restless rumination on the theme of age; between the zinging jokes and the customary sprees of music, you can hear the ominous pulse of passing time.—A.L. (3/30/15) (In limited release.)



Lindstrøm brings his seductive dance songs to Good Room, in Greenpoint.

COSMIC BEAT

How a Norwegian music producer became the king of space disco.

HANS-PETER LINDSTRØM probably sealed his own fate in 2005, with the release of a suave but digressive dance track called “I Feel Space.” It consisted of seven minutes of modernized disco, with hazy synthesizers and hints of dissonance fading in and out atop a steady beat. Its popularity, especially among d.j.s, helped link its creator, known professionally as Lindstrøm, to a specific and rather spurious subgenre: space disco. This is a subgenre with a history, indebted to cult-classic disco records like “Nightflight to Venus,” a Boney M. song from 1978. And it doesn’t fully describe Lindstrøm’s productions, which tend to be spacey in a neurological rather than cosmological sense: his music is engineered to mimic—or cause—the sensation of pleasurable discombobulation commonly associated with late-night dance floors. Lindstrøm himself is not a d.j., though, so when he performs at Good Room, on April 23, he will have with him a laptop and electronic controllers, the better to reassemble his own hits and scraps into a seamless and somewhat disorienting mix that sounds like one long song.

Lindstrøm grew up in Stavanger, on the southwestern coast of Norway, where his pop-music diet included plenty of European disco and New Wave. He moved to Oslo for college, where he fell in with a group of like-minded producers, including Prins Thomas, with whom he released a series of albums. Lindstrøm developed a knack for using volume and melodic modulation to create a feeling of constant escalation, as if a mild-mannered disco track were being pushed to its logical conclusion, and then beyond. Central to this enterprise was an implicit sense of mischief, which became explicit in 2012 with the release of “Six Cups of Rebel.” It was bombastic and cheerfully overstuffed; one song even violated the first commandment of dance music—keep the beat going—to make way



NIGHT LIFE

for a series of off-kilter computerized drumrolls. A stern review in Pitchfork called the whole effort “drunken” and “misguided”; readers brave enough to take that description as a recommendation were rewarded with one of the funniest, most fearless albums of the year.

There are many ways to be absurd. One of Lindstrøm’s latest productions is “Y.M.D.,” a euphoric collaboration with the Norwegian singer Maya Vik; the initials stand for “Young Michael Douglas,” and after Vik exhales the chorus she adds a dreamy afterthought: “Now I see that greed is good.” Meanwhile, Lindstrøm has recruited the rock-and-roll auteur Todd Rundgren and Emil Nikolaisen, of the Norwegian indie band Serena-Maneesh, to create a collaborative album called “Runddans,” which is a singularly alien artifact: it careens from disco to ambient noise to something that seems like the beginnings of a rock opera. The album lasts for forty minutes, and, though it officially consists of twelve tracks, it sounds—needless to say—like one long song.

—Kelefa Sanneh

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Container

Ren Schofield, who grew up in the early aughts on the periphery of the noise scene around RISD, in Providence, Rhode Island, brings a damaged-warehouse aesthetic to his solo-electronic project, Container, which has been accumulating a solid fan base in spite of his challenging material. (In February, Björk tweeted her approval after attending a show in Bushwick.) Using a variety of outmoded synths and four-track cassette tape, Schofield crafts crumbling, degraded techno that walks through the walls between techno and noise as if they never existed in the first place. He and his mutant dance party celebrate the one-year anniversary of Palisades, an all-ages D.I.Y. venue that has become the première incubator for outer-borough underground music. He is joined by **Eric Copeland**, of Black Dice, who will perform an experimental solo set. (906 Broadway, Brooklyn. palisadesbk.com. April 25.)

Ben Folds

The Nashville-based piano man has always been a pop classicist: as the leader of the Ben Folds Five and as a solo artist, he has carried the torch for the kind of brainy, heartfelt piano-driven chart-toppers pioneered in the seventies by superstars like Elton John and Billy Joel, though Folds favors more pointed and often more comic lyrics. As Folds has aged,

he has broadened his musical palette and explored classical forms. His new album, which will be released later this year, was created in conjunction with the New York-based sextet **yMusic**, and he will play a few local shows with the group before venturing off for further touring. (April 27: Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111. April 28: Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn 718-486-5400.)

Hurray for the Riff Raff

Alynda Lee Segarra, the leader of this folk-rock ensemble, is from the Bronx, but she ran away as a teen-ager to New Orleans, where she immersed herself in the city's soulful music scene, honed her chops as a performer, and eventually formed this collective. The band—whose key members, including Segarra, identify as queer and advocate on behalf of the L.G.B.T. community—saw breakthrough success with their fifth album, "Small Town Heroes," last year. Since then, they have been tirelessly touring, both as a headliner and as a supporting act, though in the case of the latter, it's easy to imagine them stealing the show. The songs, all effortlessly catchy, shift beautifully from sorrowful to ebullient, and seamlessly fuse elements of doo-wop, country, blues, honky-tonk, and sixties pop. (April 24: Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111. April 25: Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn 718-486-5400.)

Pile

New England is notoriously proud of its long history of home-town alt-punk heroes, from Mission of

Burma to Pixies and Converge. This indie-rock four-piece is at the top of the heap these days. They're a bit more restrained than their local forebears, but they are just as able to stop on a dime and shift from a melancholy ballad to a blaring, tumbledown mess. Earlier this year, they crowd-funded a new van, and have embarked on a sizable tour in support of their latest album, "You're Better Than This," an aptly named ode to self-mockery and doubt which was released this spring. With **Yazan**, **Vulture Shit**, and **Captain Wizard**. (Baby's All Right, 146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. April 28.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Barry Harris

The eighty-five-year-old Harris learned his trade in Detroit during the fifties, backing local luminaries and bebop royalty from out of town. By the time the sixties arrived, he was working with such greats as Cannonball Adderley and Coleman Hawkins. (Harris can be heard on Lee Morgan's 1964 jazz-funk hit, "The Sidewinder.") A venerable jazz pedagogue, Harris has passed on the formal precepts of bebop to generations of devoted students, many of whom fill the seats at the Village Vanguard during his engagements. He's joined by his longtime associates **Leroy Williams**, on drums, and **Ray Drummond**, on bass. (178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. April 21-26.)

Nicholas Payton

The trumpeter travels light these days, accompanied only by a bassist

and a drummer. His time as a staunch traditionalist long over, Payton is now stylistically ecumenical, and he regularly spikes his fervent post-bop turns with spirited R. & B. and funk grooves. (Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. 212-252-5091. April 21-22.)

John Pizzarelli with Daniel Jobim

Brazilian music brings out the poet in the guitarist and vocalist Pizzarelli. Lighting on classic bossa nova, with assistance from the singer Jobim (the grandson of the Brazilian great Antonio Carlos Jobim), Pizzarelli basks in a tropical comfort zone that is as inspiring to him as the work of Sondheim or Ellington. In honor of Frank Sinatra's centennial, Pizzarelli is also likely to invoke the late-sixties collaborations between Ol' Blue Eyes and Jobim. (Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. April 21-May 2.)

Wadada Leo Smith

The trumpeter and composer has been a vital figure of the jazz avant-garde since the mid-sixties (he's a key contributor to Anthony Braxton's seminal debut recording, "3 Compositions of New Jazz," from 1968). A sonic conceptualist with a broad vision, he has a weeklong residency at the Stone, which barely gives him enough time to display his range and ambitions. He'll be performing music from throughout his four-decade career, joined by such fellow-visionaries as **John Zorn**, **Anthony Davis**, **William Parker**, and **Henry Kaiser**. (Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. April 21-26.)

"Sakura Matsuri"

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden's "Sakura Matsuri" (which is Japanese for "Cherry Blossom Festival") welcomes in spring, with performances and activities under a glorious array of pink and white blossoms. There will be Kabuki dances, taiko drumming, samurai sword fighting, and Japanese standup comedy. New this year is Akim Funk Buddha's Urban Tea Ceremony, a hip-hop reimagining of the traditional ritual. Other highlights include a "cosplay" fashion show ("cosplay" being a portmanteau of the words "costume" and "play"), a flower-hat dance parade, and workshops in origami, bonsai, and manga drawing. (For more information, visit bbg.org. April 25-26.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Henry and June Weldon were avid collectors who filled every wall of

their apartment with paintings, mosaic style. Their particular passion was for art by Dutch masters, especially still-lives (including pint-size paintings of flowers which depict a single, gleaming blossom). The collection, which features works by Adriaen Coorte, Hendrick Avercamp, and Van Ruisdael, goes up for auction at **Sotheby's** on April 22. The sale is followed on April 23 by an auction of American art from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which offers works by Gifford Beal and George Inness, along with a particularly winsome Norman Rockwell painting of a woman sipping Red Rose tea under the watchful eye of a black-and-white cat. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • This week and next, **Christie's** holds sales of Japanese and Korean art (April 22), prints (April 23-24), and nineteenth-century European art (April 28). One of the lead

pieces in the final sale is a not quite finished Courbet painting from 1853, "La Bohémienne et Ses Enfants," which depicts a family of Gypsies carrying their belongings on their backs. The

large canvas lay hidden in the attic of a farmhouse in Franche-Comté until 2001, and has never before appeared at auction. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Elizabeth Alexander

The poet reads from her new memoir, "The Light of the World." (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. 212-253-0810. April 23 at 7.)

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

The online literary magazine *Warscapes* presents the Kenyan writer, whose first novel, "Weep Not, Child," was published in 1964 under the name James Ngugi, in conversation with the poet and translator Charles Cantalupo. (New School, 63 Fifth Ave. warscapes.com. April 24 at 6.)

The First Annual Gilbert Sorrentino Birthday Tribute

Mark Chiusano, Joshua Cohen, Don DeLillo, Sam Lipsyte, and James Wolcott celebrate the novelist and editor Sorrentino (1929–2006). They will be joined by Sorrentino's son, Christopher, a novelist, and others. (Tuohy Hall, St. Joseph's College, 245 Clinton Ave., Brooklyn. greenlightbookstore.com. April 27 at 7:30.)

ABOVE & BEYOND



FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB THE BARONESS

41-26 Crescent St., Queens
(718-784-5065)

Certain wine bars require some method of grandstanding: a debonair jacket, say, or an expense account. The Baroness, a Napoleonic-themed bar in Long Island City, favors swords. A patron might be asked by an amicable, baroquely tattooed bartender to use one to open a champagne bottle. "It comes from the time of French cavalymen," the sabre coach said one Wednesday night. "They would be on horseback, and to save time they would just do this"—grinning, he drew the blade of his palm to his Adam's apple with a clean, slick swipe. The sabre gesture promises to be triumphantly heroic, as if summoned from Dumas or Hugo, but New York has rituals of its own; before releasing the sword, the coach cordially served his pupil with an "injury waiver." After some minutes of instruction on the finer points of "locating the seam" and "breaking the neck" and two failed tries, the junior swordsman finally succeeded in decapitating a bottle of Duc de Romet's "prestige brut," to be shared with his companion. A silver ice bucket appeared; the bubbly was poured into matching flutes. And then the novice, imbued with a new confidence, did the truly chivalrous thing, and paid the bill.

—Jiayang Fan



TABLES FOR TWO

NOREETUH

128 First Ave. (646-892-3050)

THERE ARE NO TIKI DRINKS at Noreetuh, a new Hawaiian place in the East Village, and what a thrill that is. Instead, a bottle of Viognier turns out to be the perfect apricot-scented complement to big-eye-tuna *poke*—and if the table won't have white, there's a muslin-covered book of other French wines, assembled thoughtfully by one of the three Per Se alums behind the restaurant.

Noreetuh's sophisticated wine list is the scaffolding on a menu that embraces both the high and the low of Hawaiian food. It is a rebuke to the once prevalent fantasy of a Polynesian Disneyland, and a reminder of the long migration of people from China, Japan, Portugal, Korea, the Philippines, and Southeast Asia to the Hawaiian Islands. It is also frequently delicious, and unintentionally, perhaps, forces a rethink of the widely maligned genre of Asian fusion. Upgrading *musubi*, Hawaii's favorite gas-station snack, takes guts, or rather, tongue—the corned-beef kind, which sits in place of Spam on top of the cilantro-infused rice, wrapped in a package of nori. That's not to say there aren't opportunities to eat the "Hawaiian steak." Spam tortellini could be just a gimmick, but even Italians might have to agree that there are worse things to stuff in a pasta shell than spiced pork.

The blending of traditions is consistently smooth, as in a shallow bowl of tofu swirled with uni, ikura, and shiitake. It's cold, velvety, a little bit louche. A busy hearts-of-palm salad is a precise calibration of crunch (crispy shallots), ooze (smoked tofu), and clutter (beets, cilantro), and almost enough to redeem the official vegetable of the nineteen-eighties. The kitchen's commitment to fun in every bite extends to even the most prosaic-sounding dishes, like the chow noodles, made up of uniform slivers of bean sprouts, shiitake, and spiced tofu. The occasional lily flower nests amongst the foliage. Or take that *poke*, a plateful of raw, sesame-oiled tuna, texture-heavy with chunks of macadamia, slices of jalapeño, and springy tassels of seaweed. You're on St. Mark's Place, but the taste is unmistakable: saline, like a gulp of seawater when you dive under a wave.

—Amelia Lester

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

DANGEROUS GAMESMANSHIP

During the early nineteen-thirties, Bolivia and Paraguay fought a war over an arid borderland called Chaco Boreal. Congress passed a resolution permitting President Franklin Roosevelt to impose an embargo on arms shipments to both countries, and he did. Prosecutors later charged the Curtiss-Wright Export Corporation with running guns to Bolivia. The company challenged the resolution, but, in 1936, the Supreme Court issued a thumping endorsement of a President's prerogative to lead foreign policy. "In this vast external realm, with its important, complicated, delicate and manifold problems," the majority wrote, only the President "has the power to speak or listen as a representative of the nation. . . . He alone negotiates." In this respect, the Justices added, Congress is "powerless."

U.S. v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp. has influenced law and the conduct of foreign policy for almost eight decades, but its admonitions have made little impression on the Republicans now on Capitol Hill. They have meddled in unprecedented fashion to undermine President Obama's nuclear diplomacy with Iran, as he seeks—with Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and China—to cap Iran's nuclear program in exchange for relief from economic sanctions. The most egregious example came in March, when forty-seven Senate Republicans signed an open letter to Iranian leaders, which contained a dubious analysis of the Constitution and warned the mullahs not to rely on any deal that Congress failed to approve.

Now a framework for a deal is in place, and many Democrats, such as House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, support Obama's policy. Others, like Senators Tim Kaine and Michael Bennet, have pressed the call for a congressional review of a final agreement—due on June 30th—essentially on the ground that Congress should be heard. Last week, after reaching a compromise with the White House, the Sen-

ate Foreign Relations Committee voted unanimously for an act that sets prospective terms for such a review.

Is Congress within its rights to insist on a vote? The Constitution states that the Senate must approve treaties, but the Iran deal would not be a treaty; it's a political agreement. Congress has voted on some political agreements involving nuclear issues as a matter of course. Yet the specifics of the Iran deal make it more closely resemble the scores of diplomatic bargains short of treaties that Congress has ignored, including such important arms-control deals as the one that created the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The Foreign Relations Committee act is a measured one—it may allow only for speechmaking and largely symbolic votes. That's why the Administration went along with it. Nonetheless, it reflects a large measure of cynical partisanship.

It's true that America's faltering strategy in the Middle East could benefit from a more open and informed debate, but the increasing willingness of Republicans to entangle foreign policy in political gamesmanship has opened a new chapter in the fragmentation of American power. During the Tea Party era, Republicans in Congress have adapted to unbridled, grassroots-fueled campaigning on domestic issues like

Obamacare and the debt ceiling. This collapse of inhibition is now leaching into the Party's position on matters of war and peace, from Benghazi and the Islamic State to Iran.

Last month, Senator John McCain said that Secretary of State John Kerry's explanation of his negotiations with Iran was less trustworthy than that of Iran's leaders. Kerry and McCain were once friendly Senate colleagues. "That's an indication of the degree to which partisanship has crossed all boundaries," President Obama said, of McCain's remarks. "It needs to stop." It probably won't, although that may not matter in the short run. Obama is constrained by his congressional opposition, but, with



less than two years left in office and no more elections to win, he is also freer to defy it.

Last Tuesday, the President informed Congress that he intends to remove Cuba from the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism, a further step toward the normalization of U.S.-Cuban relations. According to the State Department, although Cuba harbors some violent fugitives, including a former Black Panther convicted of murdering a New Jersey state trooper, it no longer arms or funds terrorists. Since December, when Obama outlined steps to ease travel restrictions and other aspects of the anachronistic embargo on Cuba, he has outflanked his critics. American businesses want the embargo lifted, and many second-generation Cuban immigrants are open to policy change, as many Republicans well understand.

Obama's announcement that he was taking Cuba off the list triggered a forty-five-day period during which Congress can vote to reverse his decision. The White House is in a position to prevail: Obama can veto any congressional resolution he doesn't like, on either Cuba or Iran. If he does issue a veto, the White House would need the votes of only a third plus one of the members of the House or the Senate to uphold it. Still, departures in American foreign policy as momentous as making peace with the Castro regime or resetting

nuclear diplomacy with Iran ought not to be constructed on narrow vote margins in Congress. U.S. v. Curtiss-Wright helped to establish what was referred to during the Cold War as the One Voice Doctrine. That is, despite shifting disagreements between Presidents and Congress, the country should seek to project unity abroad, in order to reassure allies and deter enemies. The doctrine has flaws; it can be used to rationalize an imperial Presidency during national crises, among other things. Yet cohesion in foreign policy is surely preferable to senators sending freelance missives to declared enemies of the state.

The collapse of comity and common sense in Congress is not just a fountainhead of divisive politics. It is also a threat to the Constitution. The United States, founded on the hope that its three branches of government would evolve in roughly equal states of health, is not likely to manage successfully risks on the scale of China's rise or the Middle East's chaos if members of Congress continue to degrade and paralyze their institution. The Edward Snowden revelations provided only the latest reminder that protecting civil rights and liberty at home requires congressional oversight of the national-security state that is well resourced, expert, and unhindered by partisan opportunism. On the present evidence, it is hard to imagine Congress meeting that burden.

—Steve Coll

DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS BERNIE KNOWS BEST



To the list of political figures who will spend much of the next year in early-decision states such as Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina, we can now add the ex-con formerly known as Inmate No. 84888-054: Bernard Kerik. Owing to his status as a felon, for tax fraud and for lying to the White House, Kerik is not currently eligible to vote, and this, among other lost privileges, is part of his point. "You never pay your debt to society," he said last week, at a small gathering in a loft on lower Fifth Avenue. "If you're a convicted felon, you're punished until the day you die. It's not right, and the land of second chances is a farce. There are no second chances, unless you're somebody like Martha Stewart."

Call this a third act, then. The notorious police commissioner, after serving hard time (three years), has become a prisoners' advocate. "We monsterize these kids," he said, referring to nonviolent drug offenders. "We

are creating a second class of citizen." Kerik has just published a book, "From Jailer to Jailed," and established a nonprofit, the American Coalition for Criminal Justice Reform, and he is determined to make his cause a key issue in the upcoming Presidential election. "I want to educate the people in those caucus states," he said. "Somebody has to ask, 'How is it possible that we have more prisoners than Russia and China? Why are there disparities between black and white sentencing?'"

Kerik was dressed in a snug black suit, with an American-flag lapel pin, and he touted his résumé at some length, like a candidate. ("No one in the history of this country, ever, with my background or my success, most importantly, has been on the inside to look at it and see what I've seen.") He had been invited to speak by an organization called The Common Good, whose aim is to promote nonpartisan dialogue, although the audience of lawyers, journalists, and philanthropists seemed to reflect Manhattan-skewing demographics. "He should have been indicted for all the shit he was doing in Iraq," one man whispered, referring to Kerik's stint as the country's interim interior minister, after the fall of Saddam Hussein. "And

then there's the Judith Regan saga!"

At one point, Kerik paused and bent over to grab some mixed nuts from a bowl. He dropped the nuts on the table. "That weighs about five grams," he said, and mentioned that some of his new acquaintances had been given sentences of ten to fifteen years after being caught with a similar amount of cocaine. He'd seen others reduced to tears while watching images of the BP oil spill on the prison TV. "And I'm thinking of the hypocrisy," he said. "Somebody destroyed a fifth of the country's



Bernie Kerik



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coastline, and they're not in here"—meaning prison. He referred to solitary confinement, in which he was held for sixty days—ostensibly to protect him from a population not known to be fond of the police—as “a mind-altering cruel and unusual punishment.”

Had his mind been altered in the political sense? Two women, named Trudy and Judy, approached Kerik and asked him to sign copies of his book. Trudy apologized for having asked him earlier about his falling out with Rudolph Giuliani, the godfather to Kerik's two daughters, whom Kerik has criticized for abandoning the family while he was behind bars. “It's O.K.,” Kerik said.

“I wasn't surprised,” Trudy said. “As you can see, I'm a Democrat.”

“That's all right.”

“Well, maybe you're crossing the line, Bernie!” Judy said.

“I don't know.”

Not likely. When asked if he had any sympathy for Mayor de Blasio in his recent battles with the police union, Kerik said that the Mayor is “not my kind of guy,” and he criticized “so-called civil-rights leaders” for making an issue of individual police shootings instead of focussing on “Draconian sentences” across the board. “I think Guantánamo should stay,” he added, on the subject of a different kind of prison.

The second chance that Kerik most wants is to be able to return to the Middle East and resume fighting bad guys—the real bad guys, “radical Islamists.” He remains on probation until October of 2016, and may not be allowed to travel abroad before then. His last job before incarceration was as a consultant to Jordan's King Abdullah, for whom he built a supermax prison in Amman. “He is the Arab version of Rambo,” Kerik said of Abdullah, adding, “He's a real Special Forces operator who, in his eyes unfortunately, became king.” He also praised Egypt's new President, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, for being “no joke” when it came to his military background. “If I were the President, I would call those guys in and say, ‘Listen. What do you need to fight this fight?’” Kerik said. “I want to eliminate ISIS.”

—Ben McGrath

HOMECOMING DEPT. POLYPHONY



Louis Sarno was born in Newark and has lived for thirty years on the edge of a forest in the Central African Republic, among the Bayaka—one of the peoples sometimes described as pygmies. A couple of weeks ago, Sarno flew by five-seater plane to Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, and from there to Istanbul, where he caught a flight to J.F.K. After watching “Whiteout,” “The Maze Runner,” “Son of Rambow,” “The Internship,” and a film that he later recalled had something to do with bike messengers, he loped into the arrivals hall at Terminal 1, carrying a small backpack that contained “Infinite Jest” and little else. It was early evening. Sarno is six feet tall, a little leathery, with a John Waters pencil mustache. He was wearing a battered fedora decorated with two blue-green kingfisher feathers.

On a number of previous returns to New York, Sarno has stayed with Jim Jarmusch, the film director, a friend since the early seventies, when Sarno was an English major at Northwestern. But Jarmusch was short of space, so Sarno was heading for the East Village, to the home of a friend who had just travelled to see him—“the first friend in America who came to visit me in thirty years,” he said. In a taxi, Sarno accepted the offer of a fleece—his warmest item of clothing was a mosquito-proof shirt—and explained that, although his visit was timed to coincide with the release of “Song from the Forest,” a documentary about his remote and materially constrained life, his priority was shopping. “A couple of tarps, cigarette rolling papers, double-A batteries,” he said, in a soft voice. He added, “I'm ashamed to say I buy the tarps in Walmart. I go visit my mother”—in New Jersey—“and she loves to go to Walmart. It's an activity I do with her.”

He was also going to buy gifts for Agati, the woman he lives with, and Ngbali, his former partner, and their seventeen-year-old son, Samedi. And, if a New York friend could help with a credit card (Sarno doesn't have one), he

would buy some MP3s of Renaissance music. He first sought out the Bayaka after hearing their music on the radio; he is not a trained musicologist, but his archive of recordings from the forest is now held by the University of Oxford. Describing the tastes of his neighbors, he said, “Renaissance vocal polyphony—they can understand that as music. But they don't particularly like it. And other music, like jazz—forget about it.” When Sarno plays orchestral music on his laptop, he is always asked, “Are you watching a video?”

He also planned to take home some beta-blockers. Sarno is sixty; his medical past includes malaria and leprosy. He now has cirrhosis, a result of hepatitis B. On the Long Island Expressway, Sarno described “a bad incident” last year, when he nearly died from internal bleeding. He then recalled how the 2013 coup in the C.A.R. coincided with a period of extreme dental distress. “It was not fun, hiding in the forest with two tooth abscesses and hearing that my house had been broken into and everything stolen,” he said.

The taxi merged onto the B.Q.E., and Sarno was presented with a panorama of Manhattan, against a sky that still had a little blue in it. “What a city!” he said.

In the middle of the following afternoon, he was with Alexis Adler, his friend and host, on East Twelfth Street. Adler met Sarno (and Jarmusch) in the mid-nineteen-seventies, a few years before she moved into the top floor of a building that was then derelict. She later bought her apartment for two hundred and fifty dollars. “It's worth a lot more money now,” Sarno said.

“We were all a little footloose, you know,” Adler said.

“A little wild,” Sarno said.

“Experimenting, with everything,” Adler added.

For a while, Adler shared the apartment with Jean-Michel Basquiat. When he moved out, he left behind a mural and a painted door. Last year, Adler sold these, at Christie's, for about a million dollars. She gave up her job as an embryologist at N.Y.U.—“I've made tens of thousands of test-tube babies, in my time”—and flew to see Sarno. Over the years, she had talked, with Jarmusch and others, about whether their friend might

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one day return to the United States. When she saw him with his family and neighbors in Africa, she said, “that whole thought was washed away.”

Adler lent Sarno a down coat and he went out to buy a SIM card. “It’s colder than I thought it would be,” he said, and he held the coat tight around his throat. In a narrow store on Fourteenth Street—cell phones and leather belts—he announced himself by saying, “I have a problem, because I live in Africa.”

In a café on Avenue A, he drew a plan of the house he’d just finished building—cement foundations, palm-thatch roof—and he shunted his chair up to a radiator. “Isn’t it March that’s supposed to go out like a lamb? This is not lamb,” he said. “This is not a lamb.”

—Ian Parker

FISH OUT OF WATER BIG SKYLINE



If you had been a guest at the opening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Plains Indians exhibition, last month, you might have been wondering, as you sipped your special brown

cocktail (called Earth) or your blue one (called Sky), why so many people were pushing their business cards on a shy-looking teen-age girl. “We need to figure out a project to work on together,” William Wierzbowski, from the Penn Museum, told her. “Are you serious?” said the teen-ager, who had on a cotton skirt, crocheted flats, and large round earrings hand-beaded by her cousin. “Are you a New York-based artist?” a New York-based artist asked her. “I am an amateur Montana nobody” was the reply.

Shania Rae Hall, eighteen, and a member of the Blackfeet Nation, lives with her aunt on a reservation near Glacier National Park. She was in town for the Met opening because she took the panoramic photographs of mountains and clouds that form the backdrops on the show’s gallery walls. There are three of them, and each is printed on a huge theatrical scrim, the largest being sixteen feet high and a hundred and thirteen feet long.

Hall and Scott Mathews, a friend and mentor who accompanied her from Montana, squeezed in some sightseeing before her museum commitments. Hall is the first member of her family to travel east of Oklahoma, behold the walls of sneakers at the Flight Club, in the East Village, buy a New

York Rangers hat in Times Square, haggle with a vender over the price of a scarf on St. Mark’s Place, have brunch in Williamsburg, discover a Banksy painted on a wall near her hotel (“Dude! I just had seen a documentary on him!”), and try pierogi at a Ukrainian restaurant on the Lower East Side. “I tried to see everything,” she said, at a luncheon organized by the Met. “My mind is racing all the time, even when I’m sleeping. But my feet are killing me.” She turned to give a waitress her order: “I’ll have the bruschetta, whatever that is.”

Later, Hall explained how she ended up in the show. “If I didn’t mess up in school and meet Scott, I wouldn’t be here,” she said. A little more than a year ago, when she was a senior at Big Sky High, in Missoula, Hall was on academic probation. She said, “Not to sound stereotypical, but my friends drank a lot.”

Mathews said, “I was working at a program for at-risk, low-income students. Shania’s school counsellor told me, ‘Find out what she’s interested in and keep her busy.’” Soon afterward, he showed Hall an e-mail that he’d received from someone at the Met, appealing to all high-schoolers of Plains Indian lineage to submit landscape photographs of their native land for possible inclusion in an upcoming exhibition. She was game, so the museum sent her a Polaroid-style Fuji Instax wide camera and a set of instructions. Had she ever studied photography? “Nope. Total newbie.” She tapped the lenses of her glasses. “I got good eyes.”

The day before Hall’s graduation, she learned that the Met had accepted her photographs. A few weeks later, she and her mother were evicted from their apartment, because her mother had become too sick to work. They slept on Hall’s half sister’s couch, and Hall took a job folding towels at a commercial laundromat. Then came some good news: through the Met and the American Indian College Fund board, Hall had been awarded a scholarship to a community college on the Blackfeet reservation. “My mom was super-happy, after all I’d put her through,” Hall said. “But two days later she was diagnosed with cancer, and she died four days after that.” She



“Hi, son. It’s just us, Mom and Dad. Remember? The shadowy figures on the periphery of your life. We just stopped by to say good night.”

paused, then added, “I don’t want this to sound like a sob story.”

At the opening, Hall chatted with more guests. Was New York as she expected it to be? “I always knew what these places looked like, but I never knew what they smelled like,” she said. “The food, the cars, and even people walking by—I don’t want to sound creepy, but so many people are wearing expensive perfumes.” Her favorite things at the museum were van Gogh’s “Wheat Field with Cypresses” and the Chinese Garden Court, which she found wonderfully serene. “There’s definitely noise pollution in New York,” she said. “I miss the mountains.”

—Patricia Marx

CIRCLE GAME CURTAIN CALL



JoAnne Akalaitis, the theatre director and writer who co-founded the avant-garde theatre group Mabou Mines, in 1970, lives in a ground-floor apartment on the edge of Tompkins Square Park, in the East Village. Each month, on a Sunday afternoon, she hosts a salon there, for women who are in the theatre or interested in the theatre. “Conversation goes from serious intellectual discourse to lowdown, show-business gossip, and the age range is from twenty-five to eighty,” Akalaitis, who is a vigorous seventy-seven years old, said recently. She launched the salon in collaboration with Jean Wagner, a professor at Bard. Usually, a topic for discussion is chosen in advance: the group has covered the work of Gertrude Stein, ancient Greek drama, and the oeuvre of Joan Rivers.

The group’s members recently turned their attention to Judith Malina, who, along with her first husband, Julian Beck, co-founded the Living Theatre, in 1947. It was a radical and influential collective: its most celebrated works included “The Brig,” from 1963, a harrowing depiction of a Marine Corps prison, and “Paradise Now,” from 1968, a semi-improvised, fourth-wall-breaking piece that advocated pacifism, anarchism, and nud-

ism. In the *Times*, Clive Barnes noted, not unkindly, that it generated “an almost mystical sense of tedium.”

Events took an unanticipated turn: Malina died, at the age of eighty-eight, on the Friday before the salon, and so what was intended to be an informal session devoted to her work was instead transformed into a celebratory shiva commemorating her life. Akalaitis’s dining table was laden with a potluck haul of salads and pasta and a big platter of devilled eggs, a favorite of Malina’s. After grazing, thirty or so women settled themselves in a circle, sitting on couches, chairs, and pillows purloined from Akalaitis’s bed. First, the actor Randy Danson read a few of Malina’s diary entries from the early nineteen-fifties—“If I did this play I would try to make it unbearable for the audience”—to approving chuckles.

“The wonderful thing about the diary is that there’s so much blood in it—it is like Bloomsbury, with blood,” the actor Kathleen Chalfant remarked. “It wasn’t careful. It wasn’t nice. People didn’t behave the way they were supposed to behave.”

Joan MacIntosh, a co-founder of the Performance Group, recalled attending a Living Theatre rehearsal. “The whole company would sit in a large circle on the floor, and everyone would speak, and no one was allowed to respond,” she said, wonderingly. Claire Lebowitz, a young actor who is writing a play about Chelsea Manning, and who assisted Malina on a revival of “The Brig,” in 2007, observed how her directing techniques had evolved over the decades. “She was deaf, and she would talk the whole way through performances: ‘He shouldn’t be doing *that!*’” Lebowitz said.

Akalaitis spoke of hitchhiking to the South of France in the mid-sixties with Philip Glass, her ex-husband, to see the Living Theatre’s production of “Frankenstein.” “It was not supposed to start until Julian levitated,” Akalaitis said. Akalaitis and Glass asked to work with Malina, to no avail: “She turned us down. In some way, she knew we had to find our own path.” Lola Pashalinski, who was a founding member of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, recalled seeing Malina’s performance in “Paradise Now.” “She was screaming at the

audience, and she was stark naked, and it took my breath away,” Pashalinski recalled. “I was so happy to see someone of that age do that.”

Cindy Rosenthal, a professor of drama and dance at Hofstra and a friend of Malina’s who is currently writing a book about her, was attending the salon for the first time. She had last seen Malina at Passover, when a small group of friends visited her at the Lillian Booth Actors’ Home, in



JoAnne Akalaitis

Englewood, New Jersey, to which she moved two years ago. “Her nurse told me when I arrived that it had not been a good day,” Rosenthal said, tearfully. “I said, ‘O.K. But it’s showtime. Judith, here’s your cue.’” The group held a Seder using Malina’s customized Haggadah. “It is a political document,” Rosenthal said. “It is filled with Allen Ginsberg.” Malina had been trying to organize a theatrical production in the nursing home, Rosenthal said: “It was called ‘The Triumph of Time.’ She believed that you get better with age, that we are wise. Hold on to age, and cherish it, don’t put it behind doors.”

Rosenthal passed around a small volume of Malina’s poetry, “Having Loved,” from which everyone read aloud. Elinor Fuchs, a professor at Yale, turned to a short verse called “Let Me Go,” which she read in its entirety: “Let me go now as I came, / With a great cry and a great hope.” The assembled women sighed, collectively.

—Rebecca Mead

THE CATASTROPHE

Spalding Gray's brain injury.

BY OLIVER SACKS



What role did the car crash and the damage to his frontal lobes play in his decline?

In July of 2003, my neurological colleague Orrin Devinsky and I were consulted by Spalding Gray, the actor and writer who was famous for his brilliant autobiographical monologues, an art form he had virtually invented. He and his wife, Kathie Russo, had contacted us in regard to a complex situation that had developed after Spalding suffered a head injury, two summers earlier.

In June of 2001, they had been vacationing in Ireland to celebrate Spalding's sixtieth birthday. One night, while they were driving on a country road, their car was hit head on by a veterinarian's van. Kathie was at the wheel; Spalding was in the back seat, with another passenger. He was not wearing a seat belt, and his head crashed against the back of Kathie's head. Both were knocked unconscious. (Kathie suffered some burns and bruises but no permanent

harm.) When Spalding recovered consciousness, he was lying on the ground beside their wrecked car, in great pain from a broken right hip. He was taken to the local rural hospital and then, several days later, to a larger hospital, where his hip was pinned.

His face was bruised and swollen, but the doctors focussed on his hip fracture. It was not until another week went by and the swelling subsided that Kathie noticed a "dent" just above Spalding's right eye. At this point, X-rays showed a compound fracture of the eye socket and the skull, and surgery was recommended.

Spalding and Kathie returned to New York for the surgery, and MRIs showed bone fragments pressed against his right frontal lobe, though his surgeons did not see any gross damage to this area. They removed the fragments, replaced part of his skull with titanium

plates, and inserted a shunt to drain away excess fluid.

He was still in some pain from his hip fracture, and could no longer walk normally, even with a braced foot (his sciatic nerve had been injured in the accident). Yet, strangely enough, during these terrible months of surgery, immobility, and pain, Spalding seemed in surprisingly good spirits—indeed, his wife thought he was "incredibly well" and upbeat.

Over Labor Day weekend of 2001, five weeks after his brain surgery, and still on crutches, Spalding gave two performances to huge audiences in Seattle. He was in excellent form.

Then, a week later, there was a sudden, profound change in his mental state, and Spalding fell into a deep, even psychotic, depression.

Now, two years after the accident, on his first visit to us, Spalding entered the consulting room slowly, carefully lifting his braced right foot. Once he was seated, I was struck by his lack of spontaneous movement or speech, his immobility and lack of facial expression. He did not initiate any conversation, and responded to my questions with very brief, often single-word, answers. My first thought, and Orrin's, was that this was not simply depression, or even a reaction to the stress and the surgeries of the past two years—to my eye, it clearly looked as if Spalding had neurological problems as well.

When I encouraged him to tell me his story in his own way, he began—rather strangely, I thought—by telling me how, a few months before the accident, he had had a sudden "compulsion" to sell his house in Sag Harbor, which he loved and in which he and his family had lived for five years. He and Kathie agreed that the family needed more room, so they bought a house nearby, with more bedrooms and a bigger yard. Nonetheless, Spalding had resisted selling the old house, and they were still living in it when they left for Ireland.

It was while he was in the hospital in Ireland following his hip surgery, he told me, that he finalized a deal to sell the old house. He later came to feel that he was "not himself" at the time, that "witches, ghosts, and voodoo" had "commanded" him to do it.

Even so, despite the accident and the surgeries, Spalding remained in high spirits during the summer of 2001. He felt full of new ideas for his work—the accident, even the surgeries, would be wonderful material—and he could present them in a new performance piece, entitled “Life Interrupted.”

I was struck, and perhaps disquieted a little, by the readiness with which Spalding was prepared to turn the horrifying events of the summer to creative use. Yet I could also understand it, because I had not hesitated, in the past, to use some of my own crises as material in my books.

Indeed, using one’s own life (and sometimes others’ lives) as material is common among artists—and Spalding was a very special sort of artist. Although he acted in television and films from time to time, his true originality was expressed in the dozen or so highly acclaimed monologues that he performed onstage. (A number of these, such as “Swimming to Cambodia” and “Monster in a Box,” were filmed.) His stagecraft was stark and simple: alone on a stage, with nothing but a desk, a glass of water, a notebook, and a microphone, he would establish an immediate rapport with the audience, spinning webs of largely autobiographical stories. In these performances, the comedies and mishaps of his life—the often absurd situations he found himself in—were raised to an extraordinary dramatic and narrative intensity. When I inquired about this, Spalding told me that he was a “born” actor—that, in a sense, his whole life was “acting.” He wondered sometimes if he did not create crises just for material—an ambiguity that worried him. Had he sold his house as “material”?

One of the special features of Spalding’s monologues was that, onstage at least, he rarely repeated himself; the stories always came out in slightly different ways, with different emphases. He was a gifted inventor of the truth, of whatever seemed true to him at the moment.

The family was due to move out of the old house on September 11, 2001. By then, Spalding was already consumed with regret over selling it, a decision he regarded as “catastrophic.”

When Kathie told him about the attack on the World Trade Center that morning, he barely registered it.

Ever since, Kathie told me, Spalding had been sunk in depressive, obsessive, angry, guilty rumination about selling the house. Nothing could distract him from it. Scenes and conversations about the house replayed incessantly in his mind. All other matters seemed to him peripheral and insignificant. Previously a voracious reader and a prolific writer, he now felt unable to read or write.

Spalding had had occasional depressions, he said, for more than twenty years, and some of his physicians thought that he had a bipolar disorder. But these depressions, though severe, had yielded to talk therapy, or, sometimes, to treatment with lithium. His current state, he felt, was different. It had unprecedented depth and tenacity. He had to make a supreme effort of will to do things like ride his bicycle, which he had previously done spontaneously and with pleasure. He tried to converse with others, especially his children, but found it difficult. His ten-year-old son and his sixteen-year-old stepdaughter were distressed, feeling that their father had been “transformed” and was “no longer himself.”

In June of 2002, Spalding sought help at Silver Hill, a psychiatric hospital in Connecticut, where he was put on Depakote, a drug sometimes used for bipolar disorder, but there was little improvement in his condition, and he became more and more convinced that some sort of irresistible, evil Fate had drawn him in and commanded him to sell the house.

In September of 2002, Spalding jumped off his sailboat into the harbor, planning to drown himself (he lost his nerve and clung to the boat). A few days later, he was found pacing on the Sag Harbor bridge, eying the water, until the police intervened and Kathie took him home.

Soon after this, Spalding was admitted to the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic, on the Upper East Side. He spent four months there, and was given more than twenty shock treatments and drugs of all kinds. He responded to none of them, and, indeed, seemed to be getting worse by the day.

When he emerged from Payne Whitney, his friends felt that something terrible and perhaps irreversible had happened. Kathie thought that he was “a broken man.”

In June of 2003, hoping to clarify the nature of his deterioration, Spalding and Kathie went to U.C.L.A.’s Resnick Hospital for neuropsychiatric testing. He did badly on various tests, which showed “attentional and executive deficits typical of right frontal lobe damage.” The doctors there told him that he might deteriorate further, because of cerebral scarring where the frontal lobe had borne the impact of the crash and the imploded bone fragments. They told him that he might never be capable of original work again. According to Kathie, Spalding was “morally devastated” by their words.

In July, when Spalding first came to see Orrin and me, I asked him if there were any other themes besides the sale of his house that he ruminated about. He said yes: he often thought about his mother and the first twenty-six years of his life. It was when he was twenty-six that his mother, who had been intermittently psychotic since he was ten, fell into a self-torturing, remorseful state, focussed on the selling of her family house. Unable to endure her torment, she had committed suicide.

In an uncanny way, he said, he felt that he was recapitulating what had happened with his mother. He felt the attraction of suicide and thought of it constantly. He said he regretted not having committed suicide at the U.C.L.A. hospital. Why there? I inquired. Because one day, he replied, someone had left a large plastic bag in his room—and it would have been “easy.” But he was pulled back by the thought of his wife and his children. Nevertheless, he said, the idea of suicide rose “like a black sun” every day. He said the past two years had been “gruesome,” and added, “I haven’t smiled since that day.”

Now, with his partly paralyzed foot and the brace, which irritated him if used for any length of time, he was also denied physical outlets. “Hiking, skiing, and dancing had been a huge factor in my mental stability,” he told me,

and he felt, too, that he had been disfigured by the injury and by the surgery to his face.

There was a brief, dramatic break in Spalding's rumination just a week before he came to see us, when he had to have surgery because one of the titanium plates in his skull had shifted. The operation took four hours, under general anesthesia. Coming to from the anesthesia and for about twelve hours afterward, Spalding was his old self, talkative and full of ideas. His rumination and hopelessness had vanished—or, rather, he now saw how he could use the events of the past two years creatively in one of his monologues. But by the next day this brief excitement or release had passed.

As Orrin and I talked over Spalding's story and observed his peculiar immobility and lack of initiative, we wondered whether an organic component, caused by the damage to his frontal lobes, had played a part in his strange "normalization" after anesthesia. It seemed as if his compromised frontal lobes no longer allowed him any middle ground, either paralyzing him in an iron neurological restraint

or suddenly, briefly, releasing him into an opposite state. Had some sort of buffer—a protective, inhibiting frontal-lobe function—been breached by his accident, allowing an uncontrollable rush of previously suppressed or repressed thoughts and fantasies into his consciousness?

The frontal lobes are among the most complex and recently evolved parts of the brain—they have vastly enlarged over the past two million years. Our power to think spaciously and reflectively, to bring to mind and hold many ideas and facts, to attend to and maintain a steady focus, to make plans and put them into motion—these are all made possible by the frontal lobes.

But the frontal lobes also exert an inhibiting or constraining influence on what Pavlov called "the blind force of the subcortex"—the urges and passions that might overwhelm us if left unchecked. (Apes and monkeys, like children, though clearly intelligent and capable of forethought and planning, are relatively lacking in frontal lobes, and tend to do the first thing that occurs to them, rather than pausing to reflect. Such impulsivity can be striking in pa-

tients with frontal-lobe damage.) There is normally a beautiful balance, a delicate mutuality, between the frontal lobes and the subcortical parts of the brain that mediate perception and feeling, and this allows a consciousness that is free-ranging, playful, and creative. The loss of this balance through frontal-lobe damage can "release" impulsive behaviors, obsessive ideas, and overwhelming feelings and compulsions. Were Spalding's symptoms a result of frontal-lobe damage or severe depression, or a malignant coupling of the two?

Frontal-lobe damage can lead to difficulties with attention and problem-solving, and impoverishment of creativity and intellectual activity. Although Spalding felt that he had not had any intellectual deterioration since the accident, Kathie wondered whether his unceasing rumination might not, in part, be a "cover" or "disguise" for an intellectual loss that he did not want to admit. Whatever the case, Spalding felt that he could no longer achieve the high creative level, the playfulness and mastery, of his pre-accident performances—and others felt this, too.

I saw Spalding again in September, 2003, two months after our initial consultation. He had been living at home, feeling very grim, unable to work. When I asked whether he felt any different, he said, "No difference." When I remarked that he appeared more animated and less agitated, he said, "People say so. I don't feel it." And then (as if to disabuse me of any notion that he might be better) he told me that he had staged a suicide "rehearsal" during the previous weekend. Kathie was away at a business conference in California, and, fearing for his safety in the country, she had arranged for him to spend the weekend in their Manhattan apartment. Nevertheless, he told me, he had set out for an excursion on Saturday with an eye to casing the Brooklyn Bridge and the Staten Island Ferry as suitable venues for a dramatic suicide, but he was "just too afraid" to act—particularly when he thought of his wife and children.

He had resumed cycling a little, and often rode past his former home, though he could hardly bear to see it repainted,



"Now, if you're feeling adventurous we can undercook the chicken."

in the possession of others. He had offered to buy it back, thinking that this might release him from the “evil spell” cast on him, but its new owners were not interested.

Yet, Kathie pointed out, despite being deeply depressed and obsessed, Spalding had pushed himself during the past two years to travel and to give several performances in other cities. But these shows, in which he recounted the accident, were far from his best. At one theatre, he knocked on the stage door before the performance, and the director, who knew him well, took him at first to be a homeless man—he looked dishevelled and unkempt—and Spalding seemed distracted while he was onstage, and alienated the audience.

As we concluded our appointment, Kathie added that Spalding was due to go into the hospital the next day for an attempt to free his right sciatic nerve from the scar tissue that embedded it. His surgeon hoped the procedure might permit some regeneration of the nerve and allow him to move his foot properly. He would be having general anesthesia, and, remembering how anesthesia had affected him so dramatically a couple of months earlier, I arranged to visit him in the hospital a few hours after the operation.

When I arrived, I found Spalding remarkably animated and sociable, with a spontaneity I had not previously seen in him—a picture very unlike that of the almost mute, unresponsive man who had come to my office the day before. He started a conversation, offered me a cup of tea, inquired where I had travelled from, and asked what I was writing. He said that his obsessive rumination had totally ceased for two or three hours after the anesthesia wore off, and was still much reduced.

I visited again the next day—it was September 11, 2003, two years since he had fallen into his “evil” depression. He continued to be animated and conversational. Orrin, on a separate visit, was also able to have “a normal conversation” with Spalding. We were both amazed at this almost instantaneous reversal.

Orrin and I again speculated as to what might have allowed this temporary “normalization.” Orrin felt that,



for nearly forty-eight hours, the anesthesia had damped down or inhibited the rumination and the negative feelings that Spalding’s frontal-lobe damage had released; the anesthesia, in effect, provided the protective barrier that intact frontal lobes would normally provide.

On a third visit, early on the morning of September 12th, I again found Spalding in a good mood. He said that he had very little post-operative pain, and he got out of bed with alacrity to show how well he could walk without either crutches or a splint (though there was no neurological recovery as yet, and he had to lift the impaired foot high as he walked). As I was leaving, he asked me where I was going—the kind of friendly question he had scarcely asked in his self-involved state. When I said I was going swimming, he said that he, too, had a passion for swimming, especially in a lake near his house, and that he hoped to swim there when he got out of the hospital.

I was happy to observe a notebook on his table. (He had told me that he kept a journal while in the hospital in Ireland.) I said I thought that two years of torment was enough. “You have paid your dues to the powers of darkness,” Spalding half smiled and said, “I think so, too.”

I felt guardedly optimistic at this point. Perhaps he was emerging, finally, from both his depression and his frontal-lobe injury. I told Spalding that I had seen many patients with more severe head injuries who, with time and the brain’s ability to compensate for injury, had regained most of their intellectual powers.

I had planned to visit Spalding again the next day, but I was diverted by a phone message from Kathie saying that he had left the hospital without checking out, and without any money or identification.

The next morning, I found another message, telling me that Spalding had

made his way to the Staten Island Ferry and then left a phone message saying that he was contemplating suicide. Kathie called the police, who finally picked him up around 10 P.M.—he had been riding back and forth on the ferry. He was admitted as an involuntary patient to a hospital on Staten Island, and then transferred to a special brain-rehab unit at the Kessler Institute, in New Jersey, where Orrin and I saw him a few days later.

Spalding was very conversational and showed me fifteen pages he had just written—his first writing in many months. But he still had some strange and ominous obsessions—one had to do with what he called “creative suicide.” He regretted that, after speaking to a reporter who was working on a magazine article about him, he had not taken her on the Staten Island Ferry and demonstrated a creative suicide there and then. I was at pains to say that he could be much more creative alive than dead.

Spalding returned home, and when I saw him on October 28th I was pleased to hear that he had performed two monologues in the past couple of weeks. When I asked how he could manage this, he emphasized a sense of commitment: if he had agreed to do something, he would do it, however he felt. Perhaps, too, he hoped that these performances would reenergize him. In the old days, Kathie told me, he would remain energized after a show and entertain friends and fans backstage. Now, although he would become somewhat animated in the act of performing, he would fall back into his depression almost as soon as the show was over.

After one of these performances, he left Kathie a note saying that he was going to jump off a bridge on Long Island—and he did jump. He felt he could not go back on this “commitment.” This was a very public jump—he was observed by a number of witnesses, one of whom helped him back to shore.

Spalding wrote frequent suicide notes, which Kathie or the children would find on the kitchen table; the family would be thrown into a state of intense anxiety until he reappeared.

In November, Orrin and I went to see one of Spalding’s performances; we were impressed by his professionalism and his virtuosity onstage, but felt that he was still submerged in his memories and fantasies, not mastering and transforming them as he had once done.

Spalding and Kathie came to see me again in early December. When I went to usher them into my office, Spalding’s eyes were closed, and he seemed to be asleep—but he opened them at once when I spoke to him, and followed me into the consulting room. He had not been asleep, he indicated, but “thinking.”

“I still have enormous problems with rumination,” he said. “I feel destined to follow my mother in a sort of self-hypnosis. It’s all over, terminal. I’d be better off dead. What do I have to give?”

A week earlier, Spalding and Kathie had taken a boat trip, and she became frightened by the “purposeful” way he eyed the water—she felt she had to watch him all the time now.

When I told Spalding how impressed people were by his latest monologues, he said, “Yes, but that’s because they see the old me, the way I was, even though that’s gone. They’re just sentimental and nostalgic.”

I asked him whether transforming the events of his life, especially some of the very negative events, into a monologue enabled him to integrate them, and thus defuse them. He said no, not now. He felt that his current monologues, far from helping him as they once would have, merely aggravated his melancholic thinking. “Previously,” he added, “I was on top of the material; I had the use of irony.”

He spoke of being “a failed suicide,” and asked me, “What would you do if your only choice was between institutionalization in a mental hospital and suicide?”

He said that his mind was filled with fantasies of his mother, and of water, always water. All his suicidal fantasies, he said, related to drowning.

Why water, why drowning? I asked. “Returning to the sea, our mother,” he said.

This reminded me of the Ibsen play

“The Lady from the Sea.” I had not read it for thirty years, but now I re-read it—Spalding, a playwright himself, had surely read it—and was reminded how Ellida, who grew up in a lighthouse, the daughter of an insane mother, was herself driven to a sort of insanity by her obsession with the sea and what she felt as a “terrifying attraction” to a sailor who seemed to embody the sea. (“All the force of the sea is in this man.”)

Moving to another house, for Ellida, as for Spalding, played a part in tipping her into a near-psychotic state, in which quasi-hallucinatory images of the past and of what she felt to be her “destiny” surged up like the sea from her unconscious, almost drowning her ability to live in the present. Wangel, her physician husband, sees the power of this: “This hunger for the boundless, the infinite—the unattainable—will finally drive your mind out completely into darkness.” This was my fear now for Spalding—that he was being drawn toward death by powers that neither he nor I nor any of us could contend with.

Spalding had spent more than thirty years on “the slippery slope,” as he called it, as a high-wire performer, a funambulist, and had never fallen off. He doubted if he could continue. While I expressed hope and optimism outwardly, I now shared his doubt.

On January 10, 2004, Spalding took his children to a movie. It was Tim Burton’s “Big Fish,” in which a dying father passes his fantastical stories on to his son before returning to the river, where he dies—and perhaps is reincarnated as his true self, a fish, making one of his tall tales come true.

That evening, Spalding left home, saying he was going to meet a friend. He did not leave a suicide note, as he had so often before. When inquiries were made, one man said he had seen him board the Staten Island Ferry.

Two months later, Spalding’s body was washed up by the East River. He had always wanted his suicide to be high drama, but in the end he said nothing to anyone; he simply disappeared from sight and silently returned to the sea, his mother. ♦

DR. ME

BY PATRICIA MARX

Am I sitting down? I have some bad news to break to me. A lot of doctors would have texted, but I wanted to tell me this in person. This case wasn't easy to diagnose, even for someone like me, who graduated from med school (WebMD Online University, '11). But first I'm going to have to ask me some questions. Do I take any medications—other than Splenda, of course? Has any-

sibility, but it doesn't run in the—Oh. Her? Is she really family?

There is also a chance that it's a disease so rare that I am the only one who has ever had it. Hey, hey. Chin up. Worst-case scenario, we get a malady named after me. And, come on, remember the incurable hair cancer? And how I pulled through, even though all the commenters on EwCan'tLookAt-

came a patient of mine when my previous physician, Dr. Mort Rappaport, failed to—not to malign a colleague, but he insisted that it was unlikely I had Dutch elm disease. It says here that I then went to myself for a second opinion since there was no co-pay. (Thank you, United Patty Care Health Group.)

Under my care, I have survived a bout of yaws (caught over the phone), an acute case of hysterical adenoids, the passing of invisible touchstones, earlobe syndrome, grocer's tongue, a calypso heartbeat, vacuous tear ducts, spongy kishkes, a brush with a plague that most epidemiologists believe was eradicated in the fourteenth century, and someone else's autoimmune disorder. Also, I cured the bumpy splotch on



thing changed since I saw me during my last visit, this morning? On a scale of one to ten—ten being chapped lips—how much does it hurt when I push here? Three and a third? I see. The medical community is divided on this, but the latest studies posted on WikiSicky.org and AlternativeToAlternativeMedicine.net indicate that I could be suffering from circuitous spleen, an allergy to elevator air, or feline tonsillitis. Or it could be a problem with my pushing finger. I'm afraid it could also be a gateway ailment to—

Oh, wait. About the other thing? I know I was worried, but according to DeanOrnishIsAnIdiot.com it's definitely not early onset (five hundred and forty-seven likes). That card left the deck at least ten years ago. What a relief, right? Average onset is still a pos-

That.net, PerniciousHangnail.org, HelloHospice.co.uk, and BiblicalHealth.gov said, Two days to live, max. Life goes on, or at least it did then.

I need me to take a deep breath. *Oooh*. How long have I had that stabbing pain? Have I ever smoked? No? What about the puff I took behind the 7-Eleven to make Eric Ifker like me?

On a personal note—and please understand that everything I tell me is completely confidential—may I ask, How many sexual partners have I had, other than myself? Great. That rules out some icky outcomes.

Unfortunately—how to put this? Before I begin, maybe I should prescribe two extra-strength doses of Long Island Iced Tea. It may also be a good idea to review my chart again. I see that I be-

my abdomen by using a seam ripper to excise an itchy shirt label.

Excuse me for a moment, but that sound? Was it the teakettle, or might I have whistling lymph nodes?

Despite how proficient I am as a healer, though, with regard to that symptom—the one which presented itself late last night, obliging me to extend my office hours—I am sorry, but it is in fact what I thought it was. Was that indelicate? Let me rephrase this in clinical terms. What I meant to say—and, believe me, I feel my pain—was that, when your number's up, your number's up.

If I were me, then, I'd shred my charts, stop shopping at Costco, and make sure my affairs were in order. Who, me? How would I know how to write a will? What am I, a lawyer? ♦

LETTER FROM SOUTHERN ITALY

A CAVE WITH A VIEW

Matera, once seen as uncivilized, is now prized for its ancient ways.

BY D. T. MAX

Take any road in Italy, look up, and you'll see a lovely hilltop town: a campanile, a castello, a few newer buildings spilling down the slope, as if expelled for the crime of ugliness. But even amid this bounty there is something exceptional about Matera. It clings to a denuded peak in the extreme south of the country, in the Basilicata region—the instep of Italy's boot. Travellers are often shocked by the starkness of Matera. It's a claustrophobic outcropping of cave dwellings carved into limestone, like scrimshaw, with hardly a tree or a blade of grass to be seen. In the afternoon sun, Matera looks like a pile of tarnished

gold thrown down by a careless giant. Its severe beauty is as much a tribute to human resilience as to the rugged landscape where it is situated. Most places in Italy encourage you to celebrate the prettiness that wealth bestows: exquisite iron grillwork, festive marble fountains. Matera is more visceral—a monument to endurance and thrift, to hard lives lived without waste.

Matera may look inhospitable, but people have been settling here for a long time: it is often cited as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, in a league with Aleppo and Byblos. There is something inherently alluring

about this natural fortress, which towers above fertile plains and the Gravina River. A cave near Matera contains the remains of a hundred-and-fifty-thousand-year-old hominid; another has tools and bones from ten thousand years ago, and dozens of Neolithic sites dot the surrounding ridges. Matera was already a significant settlement in the Bronze Age.

Because of Matera's narrow confines, rebuilding has been constant, making the city a palimpsest in stone. A dig in 1906, near the Duomo, in the town center, went thirty-five feet below the surface and found Christian coffins and the remains of a Saracen invasion from around 800 A.D. The scientists kept going, and below that they discovered statues, broken columns, and money from the Byzantine occupation, of around 400 A.D. Farther down, they uncovered ancient Greek and Roman coins and, under that layer, bits of ceramics from three thousand years ago. Matera stands at what has long been a crossroads between East and West. As Anne Parnly



Inhabited since prehistoric times, the caves of Matera, in the Basilicata region, housed mostly the very poor until recent renovations.

Toxey points out in her comprehensive 2011 study, “Materan Contradictions,” Greeks, Romans, Longobards, Byzantines, Saracens, Swabians, Angevins, Aragonese, and Bourbons all passed through the town. Man came here and never left—that’s the local boast. Given this history, it is jarring to learn that fifty years ago the government tried to make Matera go extinct.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, Giuseppe Antonini, a baron from Salerno, praised Matera for its “highly cultivated” citizens and “its vast and extremely fertile countryside.” The Roman abbot Giovanni Battista Pacichelli, a contemporary of his, was likewise impressed. The town, Pacichelli noted, was divided into three sections, as it is today. The main section, the *Civita*, contains grand churches and picturesque palazzi; it is flanked on both sides by the Sassi, or the Rocks—steeply graded districts where mostly peasants lived. The pileup of the Sassi disconcerted Pacichelli: the roof of a house, he wrote, could well be the floor of a church, “confusing the places of the living and the dead.” But he, too, admired what was then a thriving ecclesiastical hub. The town was the seat of an archbishop and, at the time of Antonini’s and Pacichelli’s accounts, a regional capital. From Matera, Spanish occupiers oversaw part of the Italian peninsula, eventually giving way to the French.

Matera’s status began declining in 1806, when Joseph Bonaparte moved the seat of the region’s government to Potenza, sixty miles to the west. Over time, Matera became known as “the capital of peasant civilization.” Rulers came and went, but the locals endured in their cave homes, or *grotte*. Each morning, they descended long, narrow trails into the valley, and worked in fields that were often miles away. At dusk, they returned to the mountain. Much of the communal life of the town was lived outdoors, in small courtyards called *vicinati*.

Materans were tough and self-sufficient. They had their own rituals and songs, their own demons and dialect. Many of their traditions developed as ways of preventing waste. Using shared ovens, they produced a unique horn-shaped bread that was leavened

and baked slowly, yielding large pores that helped it stay fresh for a week. Rainwater was captured by a complex network of stone basins and underground ceramic pipes. Resourceful as the Materans were, however, their life style increasingly lagged behind that of the rest of the world. The better-off citizens of Matera began departing for the Piano—a more recently settled, flatter section of the hilltop—and the townspeople who remained in the Sassi were almost exclusively poor. In the caves, plumbing, electricity, and telephones were practically nonexistent. And until the nineteen-thirties you couldn’t take a wagon drawn by a donkey into the Sassi, only a hand-pulled cart.

Within Italy, Matera came to be seen as just another out-of-the-way town in the impoverished south; among foreigners, it had a reputation as a picturesque troglodytic locale. But, as the world modernized, curiosity gave way to repulsion. It seemed grotesque for people to live in lightless dwellings alongside their animals. In 1853, John Murray’s “Handbook for Travellers in Southern Italy” declared Matera “a dirty city” and noted that “its lower classes are said to be the most uncivilized in the whole province of Basilicata.” Its problems seemed intractable: poor sanitation, brutal work conditions, malaria. Yet the population continued to grow, reaching fifteen thousand by the early twentieth century. Half a dozen family members often crowded into a cave; residents used basins for toilets and burned the waste on the cliffs. Italy was falling behind the other nations of Europe, Basilicata was falling behind Italy, and Matera seemed to be last of all.

In 1902, Prime Minister Giuseppe Zanardelli visited the Sassi and reported that it awoke in him “not just amazement but deep pity.” He proposed new railways, which weren’t completed, and land redistribution, which didn’t happen. In 1926, the archeologist and social activist Umberto Zanotti Bianco called Matera “a Dantean horror.”

By this time, the Fascists were in power, and Benito Mussolini was determined to bring his humiliated country up to date. Matera was an obvious candidate for modernization. He connected the town to the Apulian aqueduct, providing the Sassi with running

water, but the Fascists were stymied by the prospect of overhauling the caves. One solution, they decided, was to depopulate the Sassi and transfer the residents to houses near their fields.

Mussolini was ousted in 1943, and, paradoxically, it was one of his opponents, the leftist Carlo Levi, who fulfilled the Fascist agenda for Matera. Levi, a doctor and a painter from Turin’s upper class, had been arrested for anti-Fascist activities in 1935 and exiled to Aliano, south of Matera. He spent a year there, amid poverty that he would not have seen otherwise. In his 1945 autobiographical novel, “Christ Stopped at Eboli,” he described the peasants of Italy’s extreme south as living “in a world that rolls on independent of their will, where man is in no way separate from his sun, his beast, his malaria.” During his exile, Levi visited Matera only briefly, but his sister, also a doctor, passed through on her way to see him, and his book incorporated her observations of children “sitting on the doorsteps, in the dirt, while the sun beat down on them, with their eyes half-closed and their eyelids red and swollen” from trachoma. She described boys and girls trailing her down a path, begging for quinine.

Levi was a gifted polemicist, and his concise retelling of his sister’s experience changed Matera’s destiny. “Christ Stopped at Eboli” was widely translated, and the Sassi became notorious. Italian newspapers started calling Matera a national embarrassment. There were many villages in bad shape across southern Italy, but, as Toxey notes, the “mere idea of a cave, with its subhuman associations, offended the progressive mentality of the designers and leaders of the postwar world.”

In 1950, Alcide de Gasperi, the head of the Christian Democrats, visited the Sassi and declared that “this sad remnant of past centuries should disappear.” Two years later, the party passed the first bill for the *risanamento*, or cleanup, of the Sassi. Materans living in the worst caves would be moved; the more habitable *grotte* would be renovated.

At the time, the United States was funding the rebuilding of Europe through the Marshall Plan. With money flowing in, the Materan *risanamento* could be done with style. Italian architects were filled with modernist ideas

for creating ideal communities. Problems of economic inequality that had never been solved politically might, they believed, be solved aesthetically. Materans would not be forced into generic new apartments; rather, they would be immersed in communities that reproduced the nurturing aspects of Sassi life—the courtyards where people met and gossiped, the communal ovens where they baked their special bread.

The Italian planners had in mind the ambitious example of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which had resettled thousands of Appalachian families. An American sociologist, Friedrich Friedmann, led a team of researchers—including a historian, a doctor, a geographer, and a psychologist—who assessed conditions in the Sassi. After architects devised several potential resettlement schemes, Friedmann's team asked the peasants which design they thought was best. In the new rural development of La Martella, four miles west of the Sassi, the architect Ludovico Quaroni attempted to re-create the open-air *vicinati* that the Materans had used as their plazas and drawing rooms. Each resettled family was given a house with an adjoining barn for animals; the bedroom windows looked out on the stables, so that residents could keep an eye on the beasts at night, as they had in the Sassi. The first families were moved to La Martella in 1954. The *Giornale del Mezzogiorno* declared that Materans had travelled “from the darkness of the Sassi to cottages in the green countryside!” Italian newspapers continued to support the cause, and the government began encouraging residents whose caves had originally been thought salvageable to move.

The process of moving the peasants, though, did not go as planned. Not enough land was made available for farming. The new *vicinati* did not feel like the courtyards of Matera—they were not placed at the juncture of several houses, so residents did not naturally spill into them. Ambitions flagged, and builders began putting up ordinary apartment complexes.

In 1961, a reporter for *La Stampa* found the Sassi empty but for a man and his lonely mule, which had been “made melancholy,” its owner speculated, by the disappearance of the peo-

ple it had known. In the article, the director of local tourism suggested, hopefully, that the Sassi should become a museum. The newspaper later reported that locals wanted to use cement to bury the Sassi—or dynamite to blow up the area. Such radical measures turned out not to be necessary. Long before the caves were empty, the oldest ones began crumbling, and the government began fencing them off. Matera's ancient settlement appeared to be coming to an end.

In fact, the Sassi was about to be reborn. Squatters began occupying some of the caves, and others were used for drugs and prostitution. Then Raffaello De Ruggieri, a lawyer who considered the depopulation campaign a grievous mistake, moved in. “People felt I was crazy to subject my wife to the desolation and emptiness of the Sassi,” he recalls. The De Ruggieris were relieved to discover, however, that they had some friendly neighbors. Local artisans used the caves as workshops for making *cucù*—ceramic rooster whistles that are a town tradition.

Other young Italians began seeing the Sassi's potential, and they became homesteaders. Roofs were buttressed, and modern plumbing was installed. In 1986, the Italian government encouraged the Sassi's revival by offering subsidies that cut the cost of restoration work in half. Small shops began to appear, and in 1992 La Traccia, a software company, opened. “We came here be-



cause everyone else was boycotting it,” Franco Petrella, one of the owners, told an Italian newspaper.

For a time, the new Sassi and the old butted heads. When a pioneering restaurant, Il Caffè del Cavaliere, opened, someone set off a small bomb in its entryway. The *Corriere della Sera* reported that some new residents felt as if they were living in the Wild West, and were thinking of buying guns to fend off “harassment, requests

for money, and acts of intimidation.”

But order was established, and as the limestone hilltop was restored its rough simplicity found new admirers. In 1993, UNESCO named the Sassi a World Heritage site, and with that designation “tourism really began,” according to Nicola Rizzi, a retired high-school teacher who was born in the Sassi. Cave dwellings were combined to form restaurants and boutique hotels.

Materan culture, once thought backward, was now admired for its warmth and its precocious commitment to sustainability. By the turn of the millennium, the Sassi had a popular jazz club, and artisanal winemakers were storing their grapes in the limestone warrens. A candlelit cave set on a hilltop turns out to be an ideal spot for a holistic spa.

In February, I flew to Bari, a port city on Italy's southeastern coast, and drove forty miles, to the hilltop. To enter the Sassi now, you have to park on the edge of sprawling modern Matera, which sits along the western side of the old cave town, and go the final hundred yards on foot. The modern quarter was built on a plain above the cliffs, so you walk down a winding road to reach the Sassi. It was night when I arrived at my bed-and-breakfast, the Casa nei Sassi, which opened a few years ago. Light from street lamps installed in the nineties reflected off the paving stones. Cats prowled alleys that glistened in a light rain. For centuries, the street where I was staying had been an open sewer; the Fascists had paved it over. In the aughts, the strip became crowded with clubs and restaurants. It can get noisy during the summer, but is tranquil in the middle of winter. My room was at the top of a dozen twisting steps, in a converted hayloft, and it overlooked a bar where I sampled Padre Pepe, a Southern Italian liqueur made from green walnuts. From my balcony, I had a view of hundreds of irregular terraces, odd abutments, incidental buttresses, and half-hidden alleys.

The next morning, when the sun came up over the plateau that faces Matera to the east, I set out for a walk. You can get anywhere in town by way of the mazelike steps, but I took another road built by the Fascists, Via Madonna delle Virtù, which follows the edge of a thousand-foot cliff. Soon I stood on

an outcropping—slabs of stone ending in a low wall. Behind me were the *grotte*, hunched and worn, one on top of the other. In the oldest part of the city, there are almost no stores, bars, or restaurants. Laundry fluttered from an occasional balcony, but most of the structures were unoccupied. Rows of vacant caves looked like giant skulls, with the empty doorways as eyes. The limestone walls were pockmarked, rain-streaked, and sun-bleached, and they varied in hue, from gray to yellow, as the light moved across them.

To see the new Matera emerging from the old, you have to look up the hillside. These residences have the best light and, being closest to the modern city, were the easiest to renovate. They first drew architects and other creative people, then arts professionals and Web designers, and, finally, wealthier types. It's like a tiny Tribeca. Many of the cave interiors have been playfully reimagined; in some, ceilings have been knocked out, creating three-story aeries.

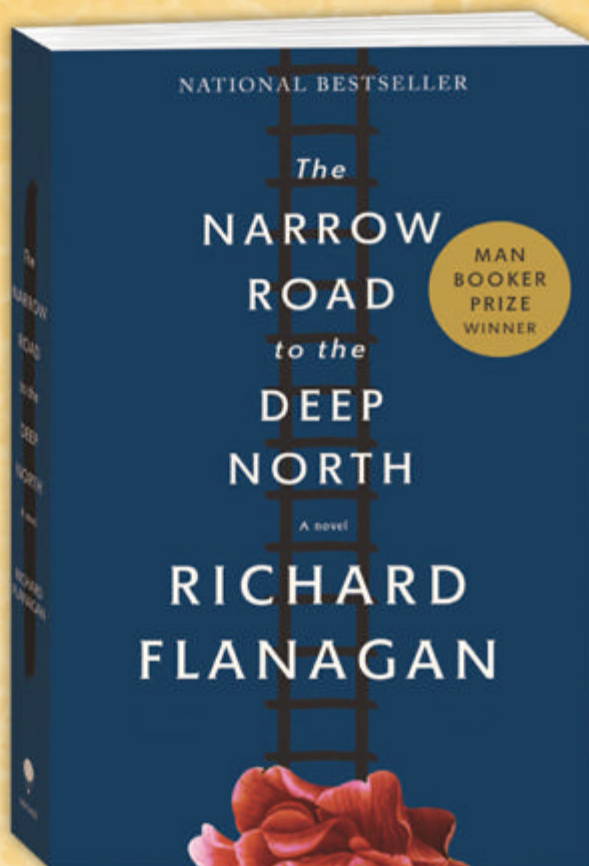
On my walk, I came upon a four-star hotel, Casa di Lucio, which opened in 2001. In the hotel's windowless dining room, white laminate moderno tables were neatly aligned, and recessed wall lighting emphasized the pebbly nap and the roseate color of the limestone. A deep cistern was on display under glass. The hotel, whose rooms are spread out over several caves, had the one-of-a-kind glamour of the paradors that occupy former monasteries and fortresses in Spain. Nearby, in the basement of the Palazzo Gattini, whose owner was assassinated by brigands in 1860, there is a luxury spa offering hot-stone massages for ninety euros. An old cistern had been turned into a small swimming pool.

The new residents of Matera don't always seem imbued with the communal spirit of the old days: some property owners have fenced off *vicinati*, making the most public part of the Sassi private. As I went around the Sassi, I was relieved when I came upon a buzzing marketplace where apples filled straw baskets and smoked fish dangled from wooden trestles. An energetic young woman was currying a donkey and chatting with a young man and woman in rough clothes. A dusty wooden cart was leaning against a cobbled wall. But when

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"Touch anywhere to begin."

the carter smiled her teeth were perfect, and the way the cart leaned against the wall was archly jaunty. This hive of activity turned out to be a movie set: a Hollywood crew was filming a new version of "Ben-Hur," starring Morgan Freeman. Next to a thirteenth-century church, San Pietro Caveoso, a Roman eagle had been placed atop a newly constructed arch—the scaffolding in back gave it away. A crew had installed klieg lights above the ancient buildings. I discovered that "Christ the Lord," an adaptation of the Anne Rice novel, had been filmed in Matera a few months earlier. When I went into a *grotta* covered with a bed of straw, I joked to a production assistant, "Is this where Christ was born?"

"No," he answered. "It's just a typical Roman stable."

Matera has played a prominent role in several Biblical films, serving as a stand-in for ancient Jerusalem. Christ has walked the town's streets at least four times, most famously in Pasolini's "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," released in 1964. I became used to men going up and down the stairways in tunics, skullcaps, and neon sneakers.

Visitors armed with new guidebooks

that praise the Sassi's artisanal traditions sometimes know more about the town's history than locals whose families were transferred to the modern quarter. I walked by a handsome Renaissance structure with a precipitous view over a low stone wall, and asked a local policeman the building's name. "Convento di Santa Lucia," he said, adding that he'd learned it only recently, from Japanese tourists.

At the end of my walk, I looked across the valley, past a stream that had carved out the mountain on which the Sassi clustered, toward terraces of olive and fig trees. They were once cultivated, but now grew wild and unpruned. Across the gorge were weathered limestone caves that had sheltered shepherds since Neolithic times. Not so different from the refurbished *grotte* behind me, they seemed to mock the idea of human progress.

And yet Matera has an affable commitment to the young and the new. The town increasingly has the feel of a small Bologna. It has a branch of the University of Basilicata and a classical conservatory, whose students' music pours out as you walk under its windows. This winter, there was an exhibit on Pasolini. Each September, a women's-fiction

festival takes place. A jazz festival, Gezziamoci, runs nearly the whole year, with performances in and around the Sassi, and a national archeological museum, in a former convent, displays the riches of local digs. You can play mini-golf in an underground cistern, and the new restaurants of Matera produce extraordinarily good food, turning what was once shameful into a source of pride. Matera's *cucina povera* contains a lot of chickpeas, fava beans, and crushed peppers. An especially delicious dish is called *ciallèdd*, which, in Matera, traditionally combines eggs, the springy town bread, and flowers that grow in the nearby Murgia. (Yellow asphodels are considered the sweetest.) Restaurants proudly announce their local sourcing, and waiters are happy to tell you the story of your dish, as if a parcel of Northern California had dropped into Basilicata.

This past October, UNESCO named Matera one of its two capitals of European culture for 2019. (The other is Plovdiv, Bulgaria, a city that also traces its history to the Bronze Age.) Previous cultural capitals have included Istanbul and Marseilles, so the recognition is noteworthy for a small town in a region without an airport. The European Union has offered Matera fifty million euros for investment, and tourism will surely rise further.

The organizers of Matera 2019 have designed an official logo, a horn-shaped tube with six extrusions. Depending on which resident you ask, the image is meant to symbolize either the old communal courtyards of the town or its intricate water system. The town's pride in the coming celebration was evident: as I walked around the Sassi, the symbol showed up with Pynchonian frequency.

The UNESCO designation is seen, in part, as an acknowledgment of Matera's fraught history. No official apology has ever been given for the forced exodus. Half a century after the depopulation campaign, few cultural historians support the decision. It is now a shameful memory of a more desperate time in Italian history, after the trauma of the Second World War, when the country was intent on erasing its past. The transfer of Materans is seen as one of many

patronizing attempts by élites to save indigenous people from themselves.

The town's mayor, Salvatore Adduce, told me that the depopulation of the Sassi was "a laceration." Despite the best efforts of Italy's modernists, Materan culture did not flourish outside the caves. Some former Sassi residents abandoned farming and became construction workers, building homes for other émigrés. When that work ran out, they moved north, to work in factories. Many Materans eventually lost their dialect, their customs, their trades, and—most of all—their sense of community. A number of those who stayed behind joined the Italian bureaucracy and contributed to the demise of their town's way of life. As Toxey, the author of "Materan Contradictions," has written:

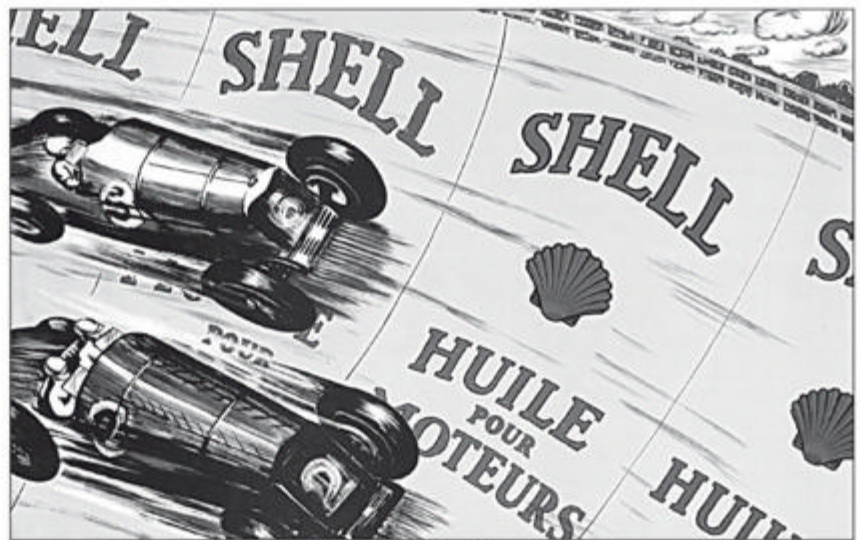
In the space of twenty-five years, the government transformed the populace from a dialect-speaking, land-working, troglodyte peasant culture that largely existed outside the Italian nation into wage-earning, tax-paying, Italian-speaking state employees and blue-collar consumers . . . dependent upon the government for work, wages, housing (rented from the government).

Locals were excited when Matera was named a capital of European culture—the mayor cried on national TV—but the accolade raised difficult questions. How do you commemorate a disastrous social experiment? What should Matera become? What should the town do with all those empty *grotte*? And how should Basilicata handle the influx of tourists?

Materans agreed that they did not want the Sassi to become just another afternoon tourist stop. "We don't want busloads of barbarians setting up tents," Mayor Adduce told me. "We want people who, above all, can know what Matera is."

The artistic director of Matera 2019 is Joseph Grima, a former editor of *Domus*, the European design magazine. Grima's approach might be called anti-Olympic City: he wants to avoid monumental gestures. The only thing that he plans to add to the Materan landscape is a portable concert hall, by the architect Renzo Piano, that Grima found in a warehouse in Milan several years ago. The structure, made of interlocking curved wooden ribs, can be brought to Matera, used for a year, and then taken down again. It fits with the

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town's sustainable aesthetic, and is properly modest. Grima told me that he had thought hard about the UNESCO award. "It certainly brings wealth, but it has also killed so many cities," he said, as tourists and destinations catering to them hollow out the real life of a place. He said of Matera that it would be particularly cruel to kill a city that has just come back from the dead.

Italy is constantly being confronted with challenges from its past: the palazzo too big to heat, the metro dig upended by a Roman ruin. At the same time, Italians like to say "*Si fa*"—"It works out." Lately, though, things have not been working out in Basilicata. It is one of the poorest regions in Italy, and the unemployment rate is 14.7 per cent. Its manufacturing jobs are being lost at a rapid pace, and between 2008 and 2013 the economy contracted by 13.6 per cent.

One of Basilicata's few bright spots is the Sassi. Not only does it draw tourist dollars; the Italians who now fill the caves are better educated and better paid than the people who left them. They are part of the generation that is succeeding the failed industrial one. Alberto Cottica, a Web entrepreneur who was a consultant to the Matera 2019 committee, told me, "The people who moved in were hipster central." The Sassi has a lot of digital businesses—broadband is available—and it can seem as if every ounce of Matera's patrimony were being presented on local Web sites. Last year, part of a prominent ancient building was loaned to a millennial-led organization called unMonastery—a group of self-described "civic hackers" who run a "social clinic" that embeds "skilled individuals within communities that could benefit from their presence." (The group, now thriving, recently decamped for Athens.) Everything produced by Matera 2019 will be digitally accessible and copyright-free.

Grima champions Matera's new digital ethic, and notes proudly that there is no plan to build a conventional new museum or exhibit space. To collect the artistic riches from the region and put them on display in the Sassi would decimate them, he argues. Instead, curators in Matera will construct an online database that can guide visitors to various local collections. "The region has an

extraordinary abundance—much of it in private hands," Grima said. Matera plans to open a reading room to help visitors appreciate the region's cultural treasures, but the objects will remain where they are. Matera's vibrant virtual community, it is hoped, can replace the traditional one that the government destroyed.

One day, I took a tour of the Sassi with a man named Vito Festa, who grew up in the district in the nineteen-fifties. He is unusually open about his past: many older Materans still refuse to visit the Sassi or even talk about it. Some of those who built new homes overlooking the caves made sure that there were no windows facing their old dwellings. They found it humiliating to confront the way they had lived before

the government rescued them. They had been told they were filthy so many times that they had internalized the sentiment.

Festa had spent several years in the north of Italy, working as a technician in a chemical lab, but he was not embarrassed about his southern past. Now sixty-seven, he looked like many older Materans, with an orangey skin tone that resulted from spending so much time outdoors when he was young. Marching with him up the hill, I could see that he enjoyed revisiting scenes of his boyhood: the steep path where he had carried water jugs home to his family, the place where he and some friends had accidentally kicked a soccer ball off a cliff. He showed me the outlines of old cisterns and called up the names of farmers who had cultivated the olive

STORM BEACH

It feels like an achievement, emptiness
Reorganized to make the matter plain.
In the long pool trapped behind the shingle bank

The sky is blue and bitter. Amstel crates
And ragged scalps of weed have likewise
Been reconsidered, while the sea

Has gone somewhere as if for good:
No distance has been spared
And the horizon is revealed as yet another

Obsolescent form of measurement,
Leaving only the sublime
By which to take a sun-blind bearing.

It's freezing when we stroll onstage—
We find the rake is steeper now—
As if at last we ought to broach

The fundamentals wisely put aside
Long since in weatherproof compartments
For such a day as this. But instantly it's clear

That ours will not be speaking parts.
The gulls will do all that. In this austerity
Of blazing salt-charged air and stunned geology

We're only here to represent the crowd
Who cross and go to do the greeting
And the mourning, further on and further out.

—Sean O'Brien

and fig trees that now grew wild. Many of his memories were about struggling to get enough to eat: he pointed to a parapet where he had put down bird traps (“I never caught any”), and to the roofs where his family had left almonds to dry. “No one worried about us back then,” he said. “Those were different times.” It had been a community, he remembered, where everyone helped everyone else. As we walked, he bumped into old friends and joked with them in the traditional Materan dialect, which is spoken slowly, with open vowels.

Festa had a comfortable pension; the Italian system had done right by him in the end. We walked past the Duomo—where he and his ten siblings and half-siblings had been baptized—and past the town’s one outdoor postcard vender, then followed the narrow path to the Sasso Caveoso, the poorest part of the town, where he had grown up. He had no trouble finding his *grotta*, now abandoned and exposed to the weather. Mold grew on the walls, and some of the stone facing had flaked off. Archeologists had dug into the floor, then covered their holes with straw. He remembered that the cave had two functioning lights, installed by the Fascists. Wires still dangled from the cave roof. His parents and his grandparents slept in the front, and he and his siblings slept in the back. Smiling, he said, “*Una pazzia totale!*”—what madness! He remembered that he and a brother had walked the family pig every evening before putting it in a stall behind their bed.

Festa’s family left the Sassi in 1959, when he was eleven, for Spine Bianche, one of the nearby developments built by the modernists. “We were so happy we jumped on the bed!” he recalled. He now owns his own house, in the north of town. As we drove to see it, I got my first good look at modern Matera. Given the economic difficulties of Basilicata, I was surprised by how vital the place seemed. It was a midsized city, with busy trattorias, a *via nazionale* that backed up at rush hour, and a dog-shit problem. We drove past a ten-foot-high statue of de Gasperi, the man who had emptied out the Sassi; his hand pointed upward, as if in benediction.

Festa’s house is about two miles from the Sassi, on a street of flat-roofed two-

story buildings that seem to pay homage to the old *grotte*. The interiors, though, could not be more different. Festa proudly went through his garage to unlock the main door. He showed me pear and grapefruit trees that he was cultivating in a tiny enclosed garden in back, the shiny marble floors, and the two kitchens—one in the basement for days when it was too hot to cook near the living room. Everything sparkled. The Sassi caves are celebrated for their lack of right angles; Festa’s home was a series of perfect squares. Nothing had any history to it, except for one red rotary-dial phone, which was meant to be decorative. “I like pretty things,” Festa explained.

Around every corner in Matera, it seemed, I came across clusters of new residents—the prime engines of revitalization in the Sassi. Many of the men had two-day stubble and wore jackets that kept them warm inside the caves. Bit by bit, these locals were reviving the city, with Web services, excavations, renovations, or small artisanal stores.

Some of them were members of Circolo la Scaletta, a volunteer organization co-founded by Raffaello De Ruggieri, the lawyer who helped lead the charge back into the Sassi. During Matera’s dark time, La Scaletta had functioned like the Guardian Angels, watching over the town’s patrimony; its members had saved rare frescoes and uncovered various cavern churches in the Murgia. “We had to choose between being the children of misery or the children of a proud history,” De Ruggieri recalls. “We chose the proud history.” Over time, La Scaletta expanded to include an organization called Fondazione Zètema. One evening, the Zètema group took me to a museum it had just opened, showcasing the work of José Ortega, a Spanish artist who died in 1990 and spent years working in the Sassi. The museum contained several papier-mâché works inspired by local artisans. The house had been beautifully restored, but it felt clammy; to warm up, I opened some wooden doors and went out onto a balcony. Matera is labyrinthine in the manner of Venice: you never know which direction you’re facing. I was stunned to be met by the panoramic expanse of the Murgia, all empty black-

ness. Standing there felt almost like falling.

The members of Zètema suggested that I visit some of the rural cave churches in the area. In Matera, they pointed out, there was a confluence of Eastern and Western Christianity. Some of the town’s Renaissance churches were deliberately built on top of the more Eastern cave churches of an earlier age. In Matera, the new has always covered up the old.

I decided to seek out a local “rock church” that is nicknamed the Crypt of Original Sin. It can be visited only by appointment, and is situated just outside Matera, along the Appian Way. Above the church is an enormous railroad bridge that connects to nothing—it was part of a failed attempt to link Matera to the main national railway lines. Approaching the cave in a car, I didn’t see anything special. This was no accident: the monks who lived here, twelve hundred years ago, did not want to be noticed.

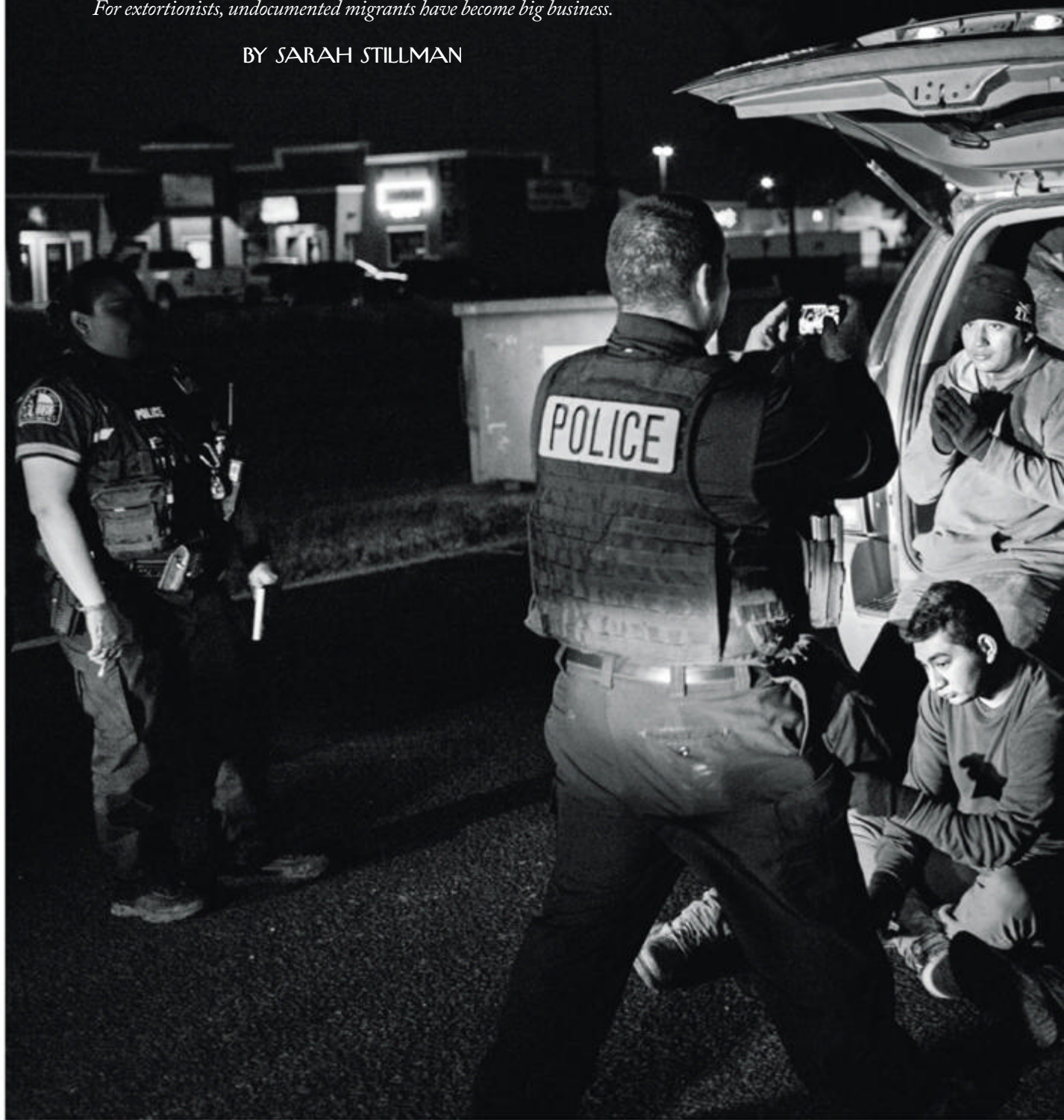
A small group of Italians were also visiting the church, and so we all descended into a low underground chapel. When the group’s guide turned the lights up, we found ourselves in the presence of half a dozen surprising frescoes. They were in the stilted Byzantine style, but they seemed imbued with an extraordinary modern sensibility: the flat figures looked at you with rounded, lively eyes, as if they might say hello to you on the street. The images, which depicted scenes from the Bible, were the least didactic series of church frescoes I’d ever seen. Mary was a warm, brown-eyed mother holding a baby in her arms. St. Peter had a beard and mustache, like a Levantine patriarch. The joy of being alive seemed more potent than worries about the Fall. Eve held out to Adam a wonderfully suggestive fig, instead of the usual apple. In an adjoining fresco, Adam raised his arms toward God as Eve emerged robustly from his rib. God was invisible except for his hand; long and delicate, it was the hand of an artist, not that of the muscular world-maker depicted on Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling. Amazingly, the rock church had been entirely forgotten during the war and the years of the Sassi’s depopulation. Now, like so much of Matera, it was found. ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

For extortionists, undocumented migrants have become big business.

BY SARAH STILLMAN



Tougher border security has made migrants more vulnerable. Routes are more perilous, and organized crime controls many smuggling

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATIE ORLINSKY



operations. One activist says, *"The harder you make it to cross, the more people can charge, the more dangerous the trip becomes."*

The kidnapper sounded polite, even deferential, when she called on a Tuesday afternoon last May. Melida Lemus and Alfredo Godoy had left their clapboard house in Trenton, New Jersey, to pick up their two daughters from school. Godoy, who works in construction, was late to meet a client for whom he was building a home extension, and his family accompanied him to the project site. Melida and the girls—Kathryn, twelve, and Jennifer, seventeen—waited in the client’s living room, snacking on cookies and checking Instagram, while Alfredo walked through the house, taking specs: how much Sheetrock he’d need, how much spackle, how many two-by-fours. In the middle of the tour, his cell phone rang. The call came from a Texas area code.

“Are you the father of two boys?” a woman asked.

“Yes,” Godoy replied. “Is everything O.K.?”

“I have them here at my house,” she said.

The Godoy’s younger son, Brayan, had just turned fourteen. Small for his age, he was greatly impressed by icons of the strength he hoped someday to possess: the Incredible Hulk, Spider-Man, Stone Cold Steve Austin. Robinson, a year older, was reflective and soft-spoken, a soccer player and aspiring mechanic. They had grown up in Guatemala, raised by their grandparents.

In the mid-nineties, Alfredo had been working as a security guard at Exclusivas, an upscale supermarket in Guatemala City that sold name-brand U.S. goods, when he met and courted Melida, a round-faced cashier of eighteen. Jennifer was born in 1996, and Robinson followed, in 1998. Both Alfredo and Melida dreamed of heading north, to seek out decent-paying work that would fund their children’s education. The prospect of leaving the kids behind was anguishing, but they’d be well cared for until Alfredo and Melida returned with a nest egg, a few years later. In 2000, the couple agreed that Alfredo would embark first on the jour-

ney to Trenton, where he had a relative who could find him a job. Melida was pregnant with Brayan; she’d wait to give birth before joining Alfredo, the next year. “That’s what we decided,” Alfredo told me, “with all the pain in our hearts.”

In New Jersey, Alfredo got steady work as a builder. Melida had a series of jobs: making cold medicine in a local pharmaceutical factory, cleaning rooms at a Best Western, and making fries at two fast-food franchises. Kathryn was born after their arrival in the United States. Meanwhile, the boys thrived in a private school in Guatemala City.

Melida and Alfredo sent money back to Guatemala to build a house for the family to live in upon their return. But life there was growing perilous. Fuelled by gang rivalries, homicide rates hovered at six times the global average, and people were dying at a faster rate than they had during much of the country’s three and a half decades of civil war. On their way home from school one day, Brayan and Robinson saw four children gunned down in the street while playing soccer, by men in a black truck. Later, Robinson was on a local bus when it was hijacked; a cop chased the teen-age culprit and shot him dead as Robinson watched. Melida’s father had been brutally robbed at gunpoint, and Alfredo’s father, a cabbage and corn farmer in the state of Jalapa, fielded phone calls from a group of local extortionists who threatened to kill his family if he didn’t pay the equivalent of four thousand dollars. When Brayan and Robinson visited Jalapa, the same men—recent U.S. deportees—stalked Brayan for his parents’ numbers in Trenton. The news heightened Alfredo’s anxiety, which worsened further when his father filed a police report, raising the risk of retribution. He called his sons and set down rules: “Don’t leave the house unless you have to.” “Don’t ever give out our phone number in the U.S.” And, as hard as it might be to follow, “Focus on your education.”

As conditions in Guatemala changed, so did Melida and Alfredo’s plans. In

2008, Jennifer crossed the border with an aunt to join them in New Jersey. Last spring, the couple decided that the time had come to send for their sons, too. They found a network of coyotes—couriers who transport migrants—recommended by friends and relatives, and settled on a fee of fourteen thousand dollars to get the boys safely to Trenton. Anticipating the reunion, the couple arranged to trade their cramped apartment for an airier place next door, where the four children could sleep in a pale-yellow attic, surrounded by the girls’ art projects. Melida got a job at a cosmetics factory that made products for a Sephora supplier—a night shift, so that she could pick up her sons from school. In March, she wrote to Brayan and Robinson on Facebook, “Soon, we will be together again—I miss you so much.”

She and Alfredo were aware of the journey’s dangers. They’d been tracking the boys through frequent phone calls, but hadn’t heard from them in three days; the last call had come just before the boys were supposed to cross the Rio Grande into Texas.

“They were lost, and I found them,” the woman on the phone told Alfredo, as he paced around his client’s living room. She allowed the boys to speak briefly with Melida. Then she said, “My brother will call you with instructions.”

America’s migrant-extortion market remains in the shadows of our fierce immigration debate. One reason is that the crime targets those who are least likely to report it. Another is that the victims of ransom kidnappings are sometimes twice disappeared: after being rescued from the stash houses where they are kept, they are often detained long enough to testify against their captors and then are swiftly deported. Some of them are informed of the possibility to seek legal relief, generally in the form of a U visa, designated for victims of crime who help law enforcement or prosecutors, or a T visa, for survivors of trafficking. Still, such protections are hard to obtain, and the price for speaking out against captors can be steep.

Shortly before Alfredo Godoy received the phone call about his sons, two men in Trenton faced trial for kidnapping a fifteen-year-old girl in Texas



while she made her way from Guatemala to New Jersey, where her mother lived. The mother told police that the kidnappers had starved and abused her. "They caused so much pain for my daughter that she does not live a normal life," she wrote to the judge. The girl would not be able to testify, "due to fear that they will see us, follow us, and do us harm."

Fear of the police can loom as large as fear of captors, particularly in parts of the country where law enforcement is believed to detain undocumented people who come forward to report a crime. One person who did contact the police was Sonia Avila, a woman living in Texas whose teen-age son, Franklin, reached Arizona from Honduras in 2011, only to be abducted by men posing as good Samaritans and held captive in a stash-house bedroom. Franklin's kidnappers phoned Avila, demanding fifteen hundred dollars. Otherwise, they told her, they would chop off Franklin's ears, or kill him.

Avila called 911. When Franklin was rescued by federal agents, she agreed to testify against the culprits. The prosecutor's last question to her on the witness stand made clear what she had put at stake by speaking out: "Now, do you realize you might have to face an immigration judge?"

"The kidnapping victims are treated the same as the extortioners," Stephanie Taylor, an immigration attorney based in Texas, told me. "They're considered willing participants." Some undocumented family members who report that their loved ones were sexually assaulted or held captive for profit have been punished, rather than told of their potential right to legal protection, she said. Taylor spent the past five years at American Gateways, an Austin nonprofit that provides legal aid to immigrants, where her clients included kidnapping and trafficking victims. In one of her cases, a mother called the police in the hope that they would rescue her three children from a Houston stash house, where they were being held by a smuggler who had jacked up his fees. After apprehending the captors, authorities detained the mother and the children and placed them in deportation proceedings.

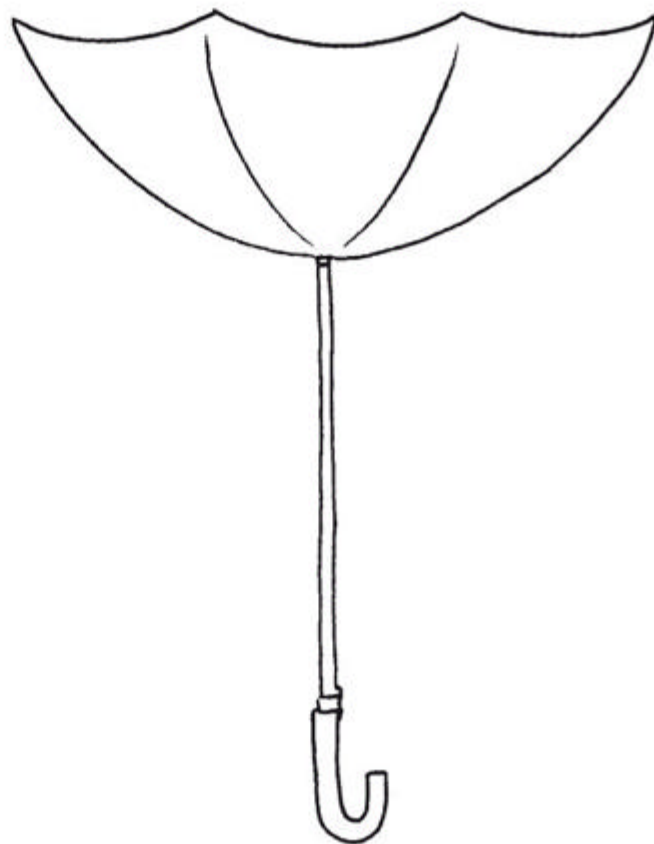
Alfredo Godoy wasn't thinking

about kidnappers when he made the crossing, in 2000. He had signed up to travel in a group of seventy-five people in April, before the summer heat cranked up, but, as they made their way from Guatemala to Mexico to southern Arizona, the scrubland felt like a kiln, while the nights were frigid. At one point, Alfredo bedded down beside a cactus in the dark; when the sun rose, he saw that he had slept next to several corpses, "just a bunch of bones inside their T-shirts." On another night, an elderly migrant demanded that Alfredo give him his jacket: "You're young. You're not going to feel the cold." Alfredo was indignant. He wasn't sure if he could survive. But he took off the jacket and gave it to the man, convinced that God would return it someday.

Alfredo's trip followed one of the most significant shifts in U.S. border policy in decades: the implementation of a strategy known as "deterrence

through prevention." In the early nineteen-nineties, programs such as Operation Hold-the-Line, in El Paso, attempted to block undocumented migrants' access to traditional crossing routes. But, rather than give up, most migrants simply adapted. Instead of approaching dense cities directly, they resorted to harsher, ever more circuitous routes, increasing their exposure, along the way, to lethal threats like sunstroke, dehydration, and snakebites.

A second major change took effect in the decade following Alfredo and Melida's arrival in Trenton. In the aftermath of 9/11, the border with Mexico came to be viewed as the site of three distinct U.S. policy wars—on drugs, on illicit immigration, and on terrorism—all intertwined in the notion of "border security." The country built some six hundred miles of border fence, and deployed Predator drones and other instruments of aerial surveillance. The ranks of Border



California Umbrella

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Patrol more than doubled, to twenty-one thousand. By last spring, as Brayan and Robinson prepared to leave Guatemala, the U.S. was devoting more money annually to border- and immigration-enforcement agencies than to every other federal law-enforcement agency combined, including the F.B.I. and the D.E.A.

One consequence of the heightened border-security measures in the past two decades is that far more border crossers have died. Between 1998 and 2012, fatalities nearly doubled, reaching a peak of four hundred and seventy-seven even as Mexican migration dipped to its lowest level in four decades. These deaths have started to decline only recently, as border authorities and volunteer groups work to rescue a greater number of stranded migrants.

Another consequence has been the concentration of human smuggling under the aegis of organized crime. According to Michelle Brané, who has interviewed more than a hundred Central American migrants for the Women's Refugee Commission, "The harder you make it to cross, the more people can charge, the more dangerous the trip becomes." The country's current approach to border security has made coyotes more indispensable to migrants than ever, Brané told me, and has led to the replacement of small-time smuggling operations—lone guides, in many cases, bringing migrants across the border—with sophisticated, and increasingly brutal, transnational networks. "Smuggling is not the same as trafficking," she said. Migrants pay smugglers to transport them; traffickers are in the business of moving or holding people against their will. "But as the border becomes militarized the differences become blurred."

Predatory groups seeking to profit from migrants' vulnerability have flourished along the border. In 2007, a spokesman for Immigration and Customs Enforcement noted an uptick in immigrant kidnappings in Arizona "related to the fact that it's tougher to get across the border" which "makes people vulnerable to exploitation." Opportunists known as *bajadores* have thrived by seeking out lost, exhausted migrants

to rob or lock up in stash houses for the purpose of extortion; they have even raided stash houses to seize human loot for ransom.

"It's exactly like Prohibition—exactly like bootlegging," Terry Goddard told me recently. As the mayor of Phoenix during the nineteen-eighties and Arizona's attorney general from 2003 to 2011, Goddard had presided over the explosion in border-security measures, aggressively seeking to eliminate stash houses where migrants were held for ransom. But he discovered that the source of the problem went much deeper than individual smugglers. Arizona's harsh anti-immigrant laws made undocumented victims afraid to cooperate with law enforcement on prosecutions, and, as long as the country continued to rely on immigrant labor while giving workers few avenues for legal entry, extortionists would have access to a consistent supply of prey. "You can push down the practice in Arizona," he said, of stash-house extortions, "and it will pop up elsewhere." In recent years, "elsewhere" has come to mean the Rio Grande Valley, in Texas—the Godoy boys' planned point of entry into the country.

Targeting migrants for extortion has its roots south of the border. For years, Mexico's ransom industry thrived by focussing on the rich. In 2006, the Mexican military, with American support, began to battle the country's drug cartels, with the paradoxical result that the strongest cartels, like the Zetas, consolidated their power. Even as they continued to traffic in lucrative specialties—cocaine, marijuana, meth—the Zetas sought out additional criminal ventures, pursuing everything from pirated oil to bootlegged DVDs. Migrants were easy prey. The cartel took over northbound migration routes, charged fees to coyotes, and began snatching migrants from the tops of freight trains riding north; they extorted victims' families with near-total impunity.

A year and a half before Brayan and Robinson Godoy travelled north, I arrived at Mexico's border with Guatemala, in the state of Tabasco, to join a group of nearly forty Central American women on a bus trip to search for their children, spouses, and rela-



Kidnapped: Brayan Godoy (left) and his brother,

tives, many of whom had vanished en route to the U.S. During the next three weeks, we travelled three thousand miles along Mexico's migrant trail, tracing the same path north to Texas that awaited the Godoy boys, before we looped back south, through the country's interior kidnapping hubs. At morgues, hospitals, shelters, and mass graves, we looked for clues to the whereabouts of the missing.

In the borderlands of Tamaulipas, police in black balaclavas surreptitiously snapped photographs of us. It was here, in 2010, that seventy-two Central and South American migrants headed for the U.S. were kidnapped by members



Robinson, were travelling from Guatemala to join their parents, in Trenton. In Texas, a woman in a white car said, "Get in!"

of the Zetas, then bound, blindfolded, and executed on a ranch in San Fernando, ninety miles south of Brownsville, Texas. The following year, some of the women on our trip had ventured to the ranch to search for evidence left behind by police. (Officials investigating the case had been assassinated, stalling progress.) Other women travelling with us hoped to trace ransom calls and clues they'd received from places such as Puerto Vallarta, on the country's west coast, where a Honduran woman's son had made his last call home, and Tapachula, in the state of Chiapas, where a mother from Nicaragua believed that her daughter

was being held by a sex trafficker.

On the first day of the journey, I sat beside Virginia Olcot, a Kaqchikel speaker from the rural northern highlands of Guatemala. Around her neck, she wore a photograph of her husband, Carlos Enrique Xajpot, in the hope that one of the strangers we encountered would recognize him. In August, 2009, after his work as a cobbler dried up, Xajpot left home to seek short-term employment in New York. He called his wife from Mexico's border with Arizona just before crossing: "My love, I'm good."

Days passed, then months, but Virginia heard nothing from Carlos. Finally,

in February, she got a call. "They left your husband abandoned in the desert, but thank God we have him with us," a man said. He demanded five thousand dollars for Carlos's return. Virginia begged to speak with her husband. A voice cried out, "Please, help me, I'm kidnapped!" followed by the sounds of a man being beaten. Virginia, who sold tortillas from her home, found a way to pay the sum, only to be met by silence. Nearly three years later, she had left her small children in the care of relatives to try to learn what had happened to their father.

"The Zetas' strategy, it's classic wholesale," Marta Sánchez Soler, the

director of the Mesoamerican Migrant Movement and the trip's coordinator, told me. "When organized crime kidnaps somebody rich, the media and police mobilize. Then the criminals feel the heat. So they realized that, rather than doing one big, flashy kidnapping of someone rich and powerful, it would be better to do a hundred small kidnappings of migrants whom nobody pays attention to." Together, we did the arithmetic: by recent estimates, at least eighteen thousand migrants are seized in Mexico each year. If a third of their families pay a low-ball ransom of four thousand dollars, that's twenty-four million dollars, with minimal risk or labor.

Soler noted that these kidnappers are often aided by the same Mexican authorities who benefit from U.S. drug-war funds. Many local police, she said, have been known to take a cut of the ransom. Last December, a document obtained by the National Security Archive, in Washington, D.C., revealed that, during confidential questioning by Mexican prosecutors, a local law-enforcement officer said that San Fernando police had helped turn migrants over to the cartel in exchange for payoffs.

The authorities we encountered on our trip were generally indifferent, and on occasion hostile, toward the mothers. At a morgue in central Mexico, a forensics specialist suggested that Virginia and several other mothers could have come to steal corpses. In Saltillo, a Zetas stronghold, the entrance to the city's morgue was blocked by a shootout between police and cartel gunmen, so we spent the day at a shelter for migrants that had recently been visited by researchers for migrants'-rights organizations. Police complicity was a recurrent theme in the abduction accounts that they collected. A typical story began, "My name is Nancy. I am Salvadoran and I was kidnapped from April 13 to June 22, 2009." Federal police, Nancy said, "took the money that was given to them as a bribe to keep silent. The kidnappers told us to pay attention so that we would see that they had paid for everything. One of the men began to bother us women and sexually abuse us. Then one of our male companions got angry and tried to defend us, but he couldn't, because

they raped him, too, and then they beat him to death."

Along the journey, in the Catholic migrant shelters where the mothers and I slept in large, open rooms, we noticed many children travelling north without parents or guardians. Shelter volunteers told us that the children were the youngest they had ever seen. Later, I got in touch with dozens of advocates and attorneys who worked with unaccompanied migrant kids in the U.S. They described a spike in case-loads, with an unusually high proportion of girls among them. Nationally, the number of unaccompanied migrant children from countries other than Mexico had increased from an annual rate of eight thousand to more than thirteen thousand in 2012.

"We're completely overwhelmed," Cheryl Little, the executive director of the nonprofit Americans for Immigrant Justice, in Miami, told me in the fall of 2013. She explained that undocumented children have no right to free legal counsel in court, and that the government had been slow to act in response to the new numbers. "And now we're turning away kids who we believe do have compelling cases, and they're ordered to be deported," she said.

By last summer, the number of child migrants travelling alone had soared above fifty thousand, straining the capacity of the systems put in place to deal with them. The vast majority were fleeing the violence and poverty of Central America's Northern Triangle: El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. President Obama declared an "urgent humanitarian situation" and directed the Secretary of Homeland Security to create an interagency task force, led by the head of FEMA, to provide relief. As the governments of the Northern Triangle sought to stanch the exodus, a U.S.-funded public-service campaign flooded Honduran and El Salvadoran radio stations with songs set to marimba beats, to discourage children from crossing: "Hanging on the railcars / Of this iron beast / Migrants go as cattle / To the slaughterhouse." In Guatemala, TV ads designed in Washington showed a teen-age boy with dreams of heading north, despite his mother's warnings. "He who doesn't take a chance doesn't win," the young

man writes to his uncle before departing. In the ad's final frame, his skinny corpse is shown sprawled on the cracked desert earth.

On the morning of May 5, 2014, a coyote picked up Brayan and Robinson at their grandparents' home, in Jalapa. The first leg of the boys' journey proved to be far more comfortable than their father's. They rode in buses through the forests of Guatemala's western highlands until they reached a hilly border town called Gracias a Dios. There, they slipped into Chiapas, changing hands to a new coyote, and called their mother to let her know that all was well. From the windows of successive vehicles, the brothers got an education in Mexican geography: the busy streets of Tuxtla Gutiérrez; the turquoise expanse of the Veracruz coastline, flanked by sugarcane fields; the bleak cityscape of Reynosa. Finally, after a week on the road, they arrived in Camargo, Tamaulipas, a small city tucked between cornfields, nearly touching Texas. The boys felt hopeful; they'd made it through the *zona roja*, Mexico's danger zone. In the morning, they'd cross the Rio Grande.

The last of their coyotes explained what would happen next. In a group of half a dozen migrants, including an El Salvadoran brother and sister around their age whom they'd befriended on the journey, Brayan and Robinson would climb onto a black inflatable raft pushed by men with sugarcane poles. When they reached the outskirts of Rio Grande City, in Texas, they would look for their next guide.

"Just walk straight for ten minutes," the coyote told them. But, he explained, if they ran into Border Patrol agents first, they shouldn't be afraid. A 2008 federal anti-trafficking statute allows child migrants travelling without parents or legal guardians to make their case before an immigration judge, rather than face immediate deportation. (The statute excludes minors from Mexico or Canada.) According to Border Patrol, some ten thousand unaccompanied children were apprehended after crossing over from Mexico in the month that Brayan and Robinson did, many of them from the Northern Triangle. If the boys were

apprehended by Border Patrol, they would simply tell the truth: that they had fled from Guatemala and hoped to be reunited with their parents.

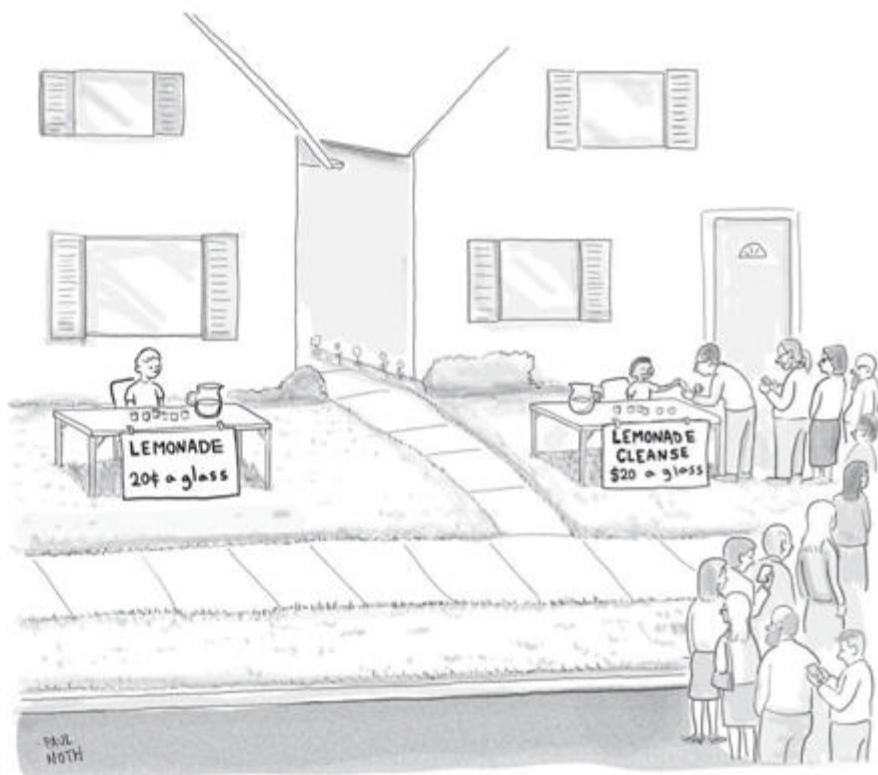
Around eleven the next morning, the children climbed from their deflating raft—it had sprung a leak, alarming the brothers, who couldn't swim—onto Texas soil. Along with the siblings from El Salvador, who were on their way to Maryland to reunite with their parents, the boys walked through an expanse of prickly pear and cat's claw to reach the road.

A white car pulled up, and a heavy-set woman with long brown hair rolled down the window. "Children, get in!" she called. The Godoys exchanged glances with the other sibling pair. They didn't know what their new coyote was supposed to look like, and the driver seemed insistent. All four kids climbed into the car.

Minutes later, they arrived at a single-story house with an imposing gate. The driver left the children with a man in his early twenties named Pedro and his sister, who collected their soiled clothes for the laundry and fixed them plates of chicken with rice. The kids passed the afternoon watching TV, but they soon grew anxious. They noticed that the house was outfitted with surveillance cameras, and they counted four pit bulls. Used to checking in with their parents at stops on their trip, they told the woman that they wanted to call Trenton. She asked for the number, and Brayan, breaking his father's rule, gave it to her.

At home in Trenton, Alfredo and Melida lay awake for most of the night after speaking with the kidnapper. Per her instructions, they had wired two hundred dollars to a man named Pedro Alonso Mendez at an address in Rio Grande City, to make sure that the children would be properly fed. The next morning, Alfredo received another call from a Texas area code. It was Mendez.

"Listen," he said. "The coyotes you hired back in Guatemala? We have nothing to do with that. This is another business." As Alfredo recalls, Mendez went on, "I need you to give me five thousand dollars, to get this conversation started." A wire transfer



would have to be sent within the next hour.

"But I don't have that kind of money," Alfredo said. "I'll have to go knock on doors."

"I don't care what you need to do," Mendez told him. "If you don't send the money, I don't know what will happen."

Alfredo required little coaxing to take the demands seriously. The week that Brayan and Robinson set off, word reached Jalapa of two teen-age brothers who had departed from a small farming town there to reach their parents, in Virginia. They were kidnapped in Mexico and held for ransom in a stash house. When the parents were unable to pay, the boys were shot.

Melida and Alfredo exhausted their savings and called their siblings for loans. Still, they fell short. Their daughter Jennifer, an honor-roll student who worked at a fast-food restaurant after school, offered her savings. At 4:35 P.M., Alfredo wired two thousand dollars from a local MoneyGram to the same address in Rio Grande City.

Meanwhile, Melida reported to her shift at the cosmetics factory, 4 P.M. to midnight on the assembly line. During

her break, she rushed to the factory's courtyard to negotiate with the strangers who held her sons. Mendez's sister answered the phone. The two thousand dollars was not enough, she informed Melida. Mendez had been arrested, she said; cops had seized the cash. (Federal court records show that, on May 14th, Pedro Alonso Mendez was arrested in connection with a different stash house, in McAllen, Texas.) She instructed the Godoys to pay fifty-six hundred dollars more that night.

As Melida returned to the factory line, with its thousands of bottles of opalescent anti-aging serum for "Beauty Emergencies," an idea struck her. On her next break, she called Alfredo. "Stay up and wait for me," she told him. "You're not going to work tomorrow."

Around this time, Juan Gonzalez, the police chief of San Juan, Texas, spurred by the region's rash of migrant kidnappings, formed the Rio Grande Valley's first stash-house unit. It was run from an improvised office in a shack behind his station. The unit's operating theory was simple: smugglers were rational businessmen. "You can make

more money in the human-smuggling business than in the drug business," Gonzalez told me when we met in his office last fall. He thought that he could put a dent in the smugglers' business model, increasing risks and reducing profits. He would teach members of the community how to spot signs of a stash house, and train his officers to recognize and help potential victims of trafficking. And he would increase police presence in trouble spots. "If you want crime to stop in an area, you saturate that area with police," he said. The stash-house unit was planning a raid the following afternoon, and Gonzalez suggested that I go along.

"Hauling ass north," Sergeant Rolando Garcia, the unit's lead officer, shouted into his radio the next day, as we hurtled past orange groves at a hundred and fifteen miles an hour in his black S.U.V. We were headed to a nearby town called Donna. Garcia turned right onto a dirt road, then came to a halt outside a mobile home with a pink baby stroller out front. A full-force interagency raid was under way: armed officers from Homeland Security Investigations, Border Patrol, the sheriff's office, and Gonzalez's unit had just closed in on the trailer.

Migrants dashed into nearby cornfields and the pines beyond as agents gave chase. Garcia joined them, a rifle strapped to his chest. This was police militarization, border-style: a surveillance helicopter beat the air overhead (a department drone had recently crashed), and a Ballistic Armored Tactical Transport vehicle waited back at the station, should matters escalate.

As the team fanned the perimeter, a school bus pulled up and a boy of about seven, wearing a small blue backpack, stepped out. He looked at his home, then at the agents, and kicked the dirt. For a moment, the operation paused as the child wove between the men to reach the front door. Then he slipped inside, and the raid resumed.

"Stash house" is an elastic designation. Often, the term is used to refer to a site where people are held against their will in abysmal conditions. Later, Garcia took me to one such place, a cottage that had recently been busted, and where dozens of migrants had been found locked inside. The windows were

FOR YOU

It's been a long while since I was up before you
but here I am, up before you.

I see you sleeping now that I am up before you.
I see the whole morning before you.

How dare the sun be up before you
when the moon last night promised to hold off the sun just for you!

I hear the church bells ring before you.
Most days it's true the birds are up before you.

I should make the coffee, as I am up before you.
I might just lie here though before you

wake up. Let me look at you, since I am here before you.
I am so rarely simply quiet before you.

The orange cat who'll soon wake you is always up before you.
In Morocco or Lamu the muezzin would be up before you.

And yes it's true most days the sun is up before you—
long before me and a while before you.

Shall I make it a habit, to be up before you?
To see your soft cheek and feel your breath if I am up before you?

Shall I prepare the *mise-en-scène* for you?
Hold the shot of the sun in my eye just for you?

Go back to sleep my love for you
are only dreaming I am up before you.

—Maureen N. McLane

barred, and bottles of urine and women's underwear were scattered over the mold-crusted floor, along with debris from the collapsing ceiling. But "stash house" can also refer to homes where coyotes pay for migrants to eat, rest, or await their next guide as they head north. Like most of the stash houses in the valley, the trailer in Donna was one of these. Its occupants were looking for work, family, and safety; they didn't want to be discovered by police.

Garcia returned after ten minutes with two handcuffed men in tow. When I asked them how they were, they shrugged. "Tired," one said. They had come from Mexico in search of farm jobs. Now they would be sent back and take the risk again.

"A lot of times, they ask me, 'How could you do this, when you look just like us?'" Garcia told me, of the migrants he apprehends. "They've got a point."

Chief Gonzalez doesn't dismiss the criticism that increased militarization puts the police at odds with members of the community they intend to protect, making it harder to gain their cooperation. When we spoke, he had a copy of Radley Balko's "Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces" on his desk. "There's always room to improve," he said.

But concerns about law-enforcement tactics in the area extend beyond stash-house operations. Advocates speak of the dramatic expansion of the U.S.

Customs and Border Protection in the Rio Grande Valley and its effect on local residents, citizens and non-citizens alike. In nearby San Benito, Texas, one of the valley's poorer towns, I met with a group of women who run "Know Your Rights" nights in their neighbors' living rooms. They discussed the region's so-called "hundred-mile exemption," a policy that grants expanded powers to border agents within a hundred miles of official entry points. One of the women, who was undocumented, described her eight-year-old son's panic attacks. Whenever he hears a siren or sees a checkpoint on his way back from school, he fears that his parents will be sent away, as many of his classmates' have been, and runs for cover, although he is himself a U.S. citizen.

Others spoke of verbal harassment at routine traffic stops. Sometimes, the harassment is of a more serious kind. Authorities in the border region have stopped vehicles and ordered anal and vaginal searches of drivers when they suspect them of concealing drugs. In one high-profile case in New Mexico, law enforcement pulled over and searched a fifty-three-year-old man for drugs. Finding none, they drove him to a hospital, where he was given three enemas, two anal probes, and a colonoscopy. No drugs were found, and the man was saddled with a six-thousand-dollar hospital bill.

Gonzalez, Garcia, and other law-enforcement officials from the border region feel beleaguered in their own ways. At a time when private defense firms have been awarded munificent border contracts—a hundred and forty-five million dollars to the subsidiary of an Israeli contractor, for instance, to help fortify the border fence with surveillance equipment—many local police and sheriff's departments have struggled to obtain funds, causing them to rely heavily on asset-forfeiture money seized in drug and human-smuggling raids. As migration patterns reroute through the Rio Grande Valley, counties with few resources and little experience have been forced to shoulder remarkable burdens. In Brooks County, just seventy miles north of the Rio Grande, the sheriff's department doesn't qualify for border-specific federal funds, despite the large number of migrants

who have died there in recent years while trying to circumvent an inland Border Patrol checkpoint. The department spends nearly half its annual budget on recovering migrants' corpses, providing autopsies, and transporting the dead, the *Texas Observer* reported last year. As tax revenues have declined, deputies' salaries have taken a hit, and volunteers have helped scour for bodies in the brush.

The attention brought by last summer's child-migrant surge, Garcia believes, further politicized the battle. In parts of the valley, vigilante militiamen began arriving from as far away as Alabama, Indiana, and Missouri to patrol the border. The Obama Administration increased aid to Central America, in an attempt to combat the problem at its source. Other people claimed that much of the blame should be placed on the parents who chose to put their children into the hands of smugglers.

This was the view of Andrew Hanen, a prominent judge in the U.S. Southern District of Texas. In December, 2013, he issued a notable ruling concerning the smuggling of a ten-year-old girl from El Salvador who was trying to reach her mother, in Virginia. The judge listed the dangers the girl might have faced in the hands of extortionists, and argued that the government, instead of arresting the child's mother "for instigating the conspiracy to violate our border security laws," had "delivered the child to her—thus successfully completing the mission of the criminal conspiracy." This, he said, was "unconscionable." Rather than apprehending only smugglers and kidnapers, the Department of Homeland Security should arrest, detain, and deport undocumented parents who, he believed, had put their children in harm's way—parents like Melida and Alfredo.

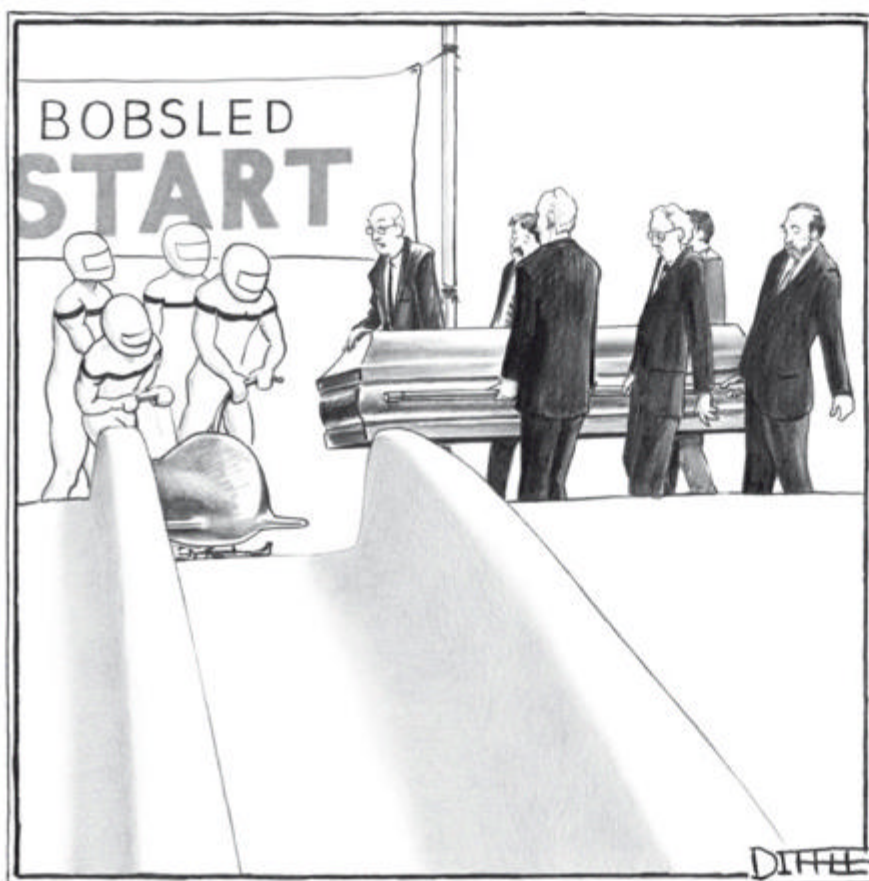
The morning after the kidnappers demanded more money, Melida and Alfredo woke up early and saw their daughters off to school. Then they drove to the home of their pastor, the Reverend José Rodríguez. In his living room, they told him everything: about the dangers their two sons faced back in Guatemala,

their decision to send the boys north, and the boys' kidnapping in Texas.

The couple had long placed great faith in Rodríguez. At their large Pentecostal church downtown—Trenton's first evangelical Hispanic congregation, where Rodríguez had preached for more than thirty years—they had seen him come to the aid of other families in crisis. Now Rodríguez had an answer for them, too: "We can't waste a second. I'm calling the director." He was speaking of his friend Ralph Rivera, Jr., who ran Trenton's police department.

In recent years, many of the country's police departments have operated as dragnets for immigration enforcement. A federal deportation program, Secure Communities, encouraged collaborations between local police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement on an unprecedented scale until President Obama called for it to be dismantled, in November; the program was responsible for the majority of his Administration's 2.3 million deportations. Trenton, however, has taken a different approach. In 2010, it became one of the first cities in the country to issue community-I.D. cards to unauthorized immigrants, and police have long been under orders not to question residents about their legal status, except when they are investigating a serious offense.

Carrying the receipts from their ransom payments, Alfredo and Melida followed Rodríguez to police headquarters, where they were met by a young detective named Jose Acosta. Ever since working the case of a Honduran mother of three who was murdered and found in a dumpster, he has been one of Trenton's leading officers for cases involving the traumas of immigrant youth. Acosta is sensitive to the dangers faced by undocumented locals, and to their concerns about speaking with law enforcement. Recently, in the Godoy's neighborhood, there had been a string of attacks on day laborers and other undocumented Latino workers who are paid in cash; in February, an eighteen-year-old, just arrived from Guatemala, had been walking back from the grocery store on the Godoy's street when he was slammed to the ground, pummelled,



"Hope you don't mind—it was his last request."

and robbed as he bled to death. "All the time—robberies or stolen property—they don't call, nothing can be done," Acosta told me. "We see ten or twelve people living in one apartment, curtains separating the rooms, no bank accounts. We need them to know that we are here to help them."

Acosta called a contact at the Department of Homeland Security in New Jersey, who, in turn, called a Homeland Security Investigations (H.S.I.) team in the Rio Grande Valley. Within an hour, they had begun assembling a search squad to find the boys. Melida and Alfredo were given instructions on how to prepare for the kidnappers' next move. "Stay by the phone," Rivera told Alfredo. "Wait for them to call."

An agent coached Melida on how to handle any future calls: how to string the conversation along, how to elicit mentions of local landmarks. Soon, the Godoy's phone rang. It was the woman who had spoken to Melida

the day before. "Did you send the money?" she asked.

Melida stalled, begging for more time. The woman accused Melida and Alfredo of going to the police; her mother knew how to read fortune-teller's cards, she said. Moments later, a second woman called, and demanded immediate delivery of the cash. Otherwise, she said, "who knows where we'll take the kids?"

Meanwhile, H.S.I. agents tracked down Mendez, the man to whom the Godoy's had wired ransom money. They found him in the custody of Border Patrol. Mendez said that Brayan and Robinson were with his family in Rio Grande City. The agents contacted Mendez's mother, who agreed to surrender the Godoy boys, as well as the two siblings from El Salvador, in a nearby parking lot.

Later that afternoon, Detective Acosta, in Trenton, called Alfredo. "Does Robinson have any distinguishing marks?"

"Yes, a little one right above his eye—he fell off a horse on his grandfather's farm," Alfredo said.

And Brayan? Alfredo described a mark beneath the younger boy's thick black hair.

Around 4 P.M., Mendez's mother drove the four children to the parking lot of a local church. As police surrounded the perimeter, a contingent of armed agents from H.S.I. and Border Patrol descended on the block. The car pulled into the parking lot and came to a halt. A cluster of agents approached, and one flung open the door and asked the children, "Are you O.K.? Did they hurt you?"

The kids tumbled out into the valley sun. Once the scene was secured, one of the agents dialed Trenton. "Congratulations," he told Melida. "We have the kids." He put Robinson on the phone with his mother, to tell her that they were all right.

Although Mendez's mother was questioned at length, nobody has been charged in the case. Mendez is serving two years in federal prison, after pleading guilty to "conspiracy to transport aliens" to the stash house in McAllen. When I recently spoke with him by phone, he described himself as a savior rather than a kidnapper. "Yeah, money was asked, but we were doing it to protect" the children, he said, noting that the kids had risked exposure to insects and animals when they were found by the road. He told me that he had asked the Godoy's for only two thousand dollars.

In the bustling migration-extortion economy of the Rio Grande Valley, Mendez seems to have been a bit player. According to Michelle Barth, a lawyer who has represented smugglers in federal court, those who profit most from ransom extraction and routine smuggling are, by contrast, masters of risk mitigation. Through elaborate supply chains, they recruit their cooks, caretakers, and drivers from "the homeless, the mentally ill, and people who have drug problems," she told me. They also court local mothers who are strapped for cash. These small fish are the ones most likely to face arrest.

Later, I asked the boys about the rescue. They must have felt relieved, I said. "No," Brayan told me. "I felt

scared.” The next phase of their journey, in the hands of the government, turned out to be the most grueling.

The afternoon of Brayan and Robinson’s rescue, federal agents moved them to a holding cell of the kind known as *hieleras*, or “iceboxes,” for their often frigid temperatures. The brothers sat on the cell’s concrete floor beneath fluorescent lights. An official came around with frozen bologna sandwiches. The *hieleras*, run by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, are meant to be short-term processing facilities; often, the rooms have no beds, mattresses, or chairs. In one corner of the cell was an exposed toilet, which the boys shared with numerous other children. (A spokesman for U.S. Customs and Border Protection said that the agency “took extraordinary measures to care for” children in “overcrowded facilities” during last summer’s migrant surge.)

By law, Border Patrol is required to turn over unaccompanied minors to the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement within seventy-two hours. Then they are placed in a regulated system of shelters, and authorities must seek to reunite them with parents or relatives when possible, or place them in foster care to await federal immigration hearings. Instead, the Godoy boys were held in a *hielera* for a week and a half, packed on the floor each night beneath bright lights.

“No one slept,” Brayan recalls. “There were no windows, so you didn’t know when it was day or night.” The kidnapers had at least given them warm food and a soft couch. At the *hielera*, blisters formed on their feet, and they lost weight.

The boys weren’t alone in their experience of Border Patrol custody. “The whole *hielera* system shook me to my core,” Jonathan Ryan, the executive director of RAICES, a nonprofit organization that provides civil legal aid to immigrant kids and families, told me. His staff of attorneys have offered advice to thousands of unaccompanied kids in nonprofit shelters across Texas, as well as to thousands more at Lackland Air Force Base, where migrant children slept in barracks

last spring after shelters overflowed.

Last June, five immigrants’-rights groups across the country filed an official complaint on behalf of a hundred and sixteen children alleging mistreatment in U.S. Customs and Border Protection custody—from sexual assault or physical abuse (reported by a quarter of the kids) to inadequate food and water (reported by eighty per cent). The nonprofit shelters often seem like a big improvement. Alfredo called Detective Acosta, in Trenton, and pleaded with him to intervene. The children were transferred to a shelter operated by a nonprofit government contractor, Southwest Key Programs.

In August, I visited Ryan at his office in San Antonio. A lean thirty-seven-year-old, he was wearing sagging slacks cinched by a weathered belt. “Forgive my pants,” he said. “I’ve been on the Lackland diet”—shorthand for working sixteen-hour, Ensure-for-dinner days doing legal-rights presentations for migrant kids at the Air Force base. He had taken to sleeping in a shack behind his offices.

Together, we went to San Antonio’s immigration court, where deportation proceedings on the children’s docket were under way. Just after we got there, a prosecutor slipped Ryan a sheaf of papers. They turned out to be a new Immigration and Customs Enforcement memo, soon to become public, which argued that women and children who arrived together at the border should be held, without bond, in secure detention facilities, because of potential “threats to our public safety, including national security threats.” For years, such migrants had often been released (sometimes with electronic monitoring) pending hearings. Now they would be held in for-profit family-detention centers, at an estimated cost to the government of two hundred and sixty dollars a night, for the duration of their cases.

“That was the pivotal moment,” Ryan said later. “The shift from the kids to the families.” After a summer of dealing non-stop with children like Brayan and Robinson, he began taking mother-child clients at Karnes

County Residential Center, a detention camp in rural Texas run by the private prison company GEO Group. Ryan helped win the right for some of the detainees to be released on bond, only to find that the amounts, which could be set as high as fifteen thousand dollars, were often too great for the women to afford.

“Let it be the Zetas, or let it be GEO Group,” Ryan told me. “It’s a for-profit enterprise that makes its money by holding people in boxes until they pay.”

In February, a federal judge in Washington, D.C., citing “irreparable harm to mothers and children seeking asylum,” moved to block detention as deterrence for certain families. But the family-detention industry has continued to thrive. In December, the Department of Homeland Security opened the largest for-profit family-detention site in the country: the South Texas Family Residential Center, in the oil town of Dilley. At capacity, it will hold up to twenty-four hundred women and children.

On June 5th, after three weeks in custody, Brayan and Robinson were put on a flight, paid for by Melida and Alfredo, to Newark Liberty International Airport. Their parents and their sisters met them at the American Airlines gate. Melida ecstatically snapped photographs as Alfredo promised to take them to a Burlington Coat Factory for a proper New Jersey wardrobe.

Brayan and Robinson quickly adjusted to life in Trenton. On Sunday nights, the family attended church; afterward, the boys ate chicken nuggets at the local diner, then jockeyed with their sisters over the Throne, the front seat of the family Jeep. In early September, the brothers enrolled at the local public school, where a banner in the main hallway read “Welcome to Your Future.” Brayan earned a certificate for generosity to his peers in his English-as-a-second-language class—“Caught Doing Good,” it read—and Robinson learned to play badminton. Alfredo, to help his sons with homework, started taking literacy lessons



from a Guatemalan friend. Melida taped English words to the walls: "note-book," "school," "together."

Then, one afternoon in late September, a letter arrived for Brayan. Jennifer translated it: he was being summoned to Newark immigration court, to face federal removal proceedings. If he failed to appear, he could be "taken into custody by the Department of Homeland Security and held for further action." Brayan's case was slated for the "rocket dockets," a system, put into place by the Obama Administration, to deal with the volume of child-migrant cases in backlogged immigration courts. Judges are ordered to speed up children's hearings, often catapulting them ahead of those of adults who have waited for months, or even years.

The deportation hearing came at an

uneasy time. Melida had just learned that a close friend of the boys, a teen-ager named Jefferson, had been shot to death several blocks from her mother's house, in Guatemala City. Melida's brother witnessed the gunman fleeing on a motorbike, and was being urged to testify in court. Now he feared for his life.

There were other reasons for concern. Police in Trenton had held a ceremony to celebrate the boys' safe return, and the local paper ran an article about their rescue, with a photograph of them with Ralph Rivera, Trenton's police director. The news had appeared in the Guatemalan press, and Alfredo worried that if the boys were sent back they would face retaliation from smugglers for the family's collaboration with police.

At six-thirty on a Friday morning in October, Brayan boarded a train to New-

ark with his parents. He and his mother wore matching Livestrong bracelets. "Are you nervous?" Melida asked, when they arrived at the courthouse.

"No," Brayan said.

"That's because you don't know what's going on," Melida said, laughing gently.

The fact that children are not entitled to free legal counsel in immigration court has serious consequences. According to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, eighty-five per cent of kids who face immigration proceedings without a lawyer are ordered to be deported, compared with just under thirty per cent of those who have representation. As of last October, less than a third of unaccompanied immigrant children in removal proceedings had lawyers; since then, the federal government has worked to allocate legal aid to more children through generous grants to nonprofits like Cheryl Little's Americans for Immigrant Justice. Other groups, like Kids in Need of Defense, which has established a network of pro-bono representation through offices in eight cities, have sought to pick up the slack. But, considering the pressure created by the fast-tracked dockets, even families willing to pay for legal help can't always find it in time, and the most experienced attorneys often lack sufficient resources to put together a strong case against deportation.

At 9 A.M., Brayan and his parents took the elevator to the courthouse's twelfth floor. Alfredo had hustled to hire last-minute counsel, even though the ransom had left him in debt. Of the twenty or so children at the hearing, only Brayan and another child had a lawyer. For Alfredo, the investment paid off. When Brayan was called to the bench, his lawyer persuaded the judge to give him more time. Melida and Alfredo could begin preparing their sons' applications for U visas, for immigrant victims of crime. On the ride home, Melida told Brayan that a friend of hers "who was horribly beaten" had been able to get a U visa to stay in New Jersey after he helped police catch his assailant.

Brayan turned to his mother. "Do I have to get beaten up to get the visa?"



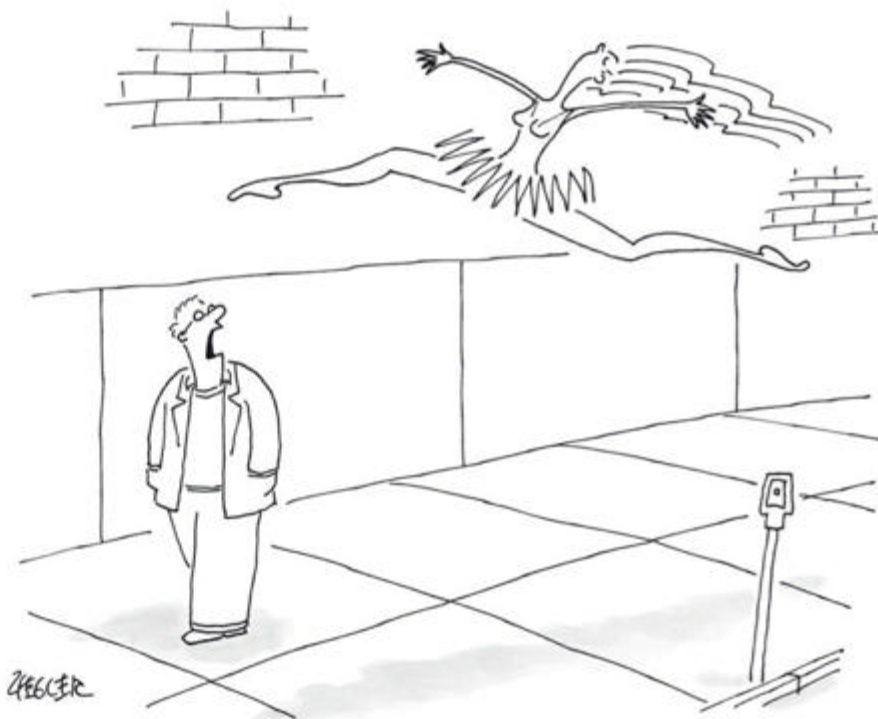
"No," Melida said, stroking his hair. You just have to help law enforcement, she told him. You have to get lucky.

On November 20th, President Obama announced a series of executive actions to defer deportations for nearly five million undocumented immigrants now living in the country, including almost four million parents of U.S. citizens and permanent residents. "We're going to keep focussing enforcement resources on actual threats to our security," he promised, outlining his plan based on the concept of prosecutorial discretion. "Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who's working hard to provide for her kids."

Melida and Alfredo were jubilant, but cautiously so. After more than a decade in the country, they would have their first chance to "get right with the law," as the President put it. When Obama spoke of protections for children, he meant those like Jennifer Godoy, who aspired to attend teacher's college, and who could now qualify to become a "Dreamer," taking advantage of an expanded category of relief for youths who had arrived in the country before 2010. He was also speaking of children like her younger sister, Kathryn, who, as U.S. citizens, have had to worry that their undocumented mothers or fathers might not return after a routine traffic stop or a workplace raid. But the reforms didn't apply to the recent surge of children who had arrived in the country fleeing violence. The Godoy boys still face the prospect of deportation. All the U visas for this fiscal year—the number has been capped by Congress at ten thousand—have been given out, and the waiting list now has a waiting list.

The legal status of Obama's actions is itself uncertain. Twenty-six states sued in federal court to block deportation relief; their case appeared before Andrew Hanen, of Brownsville, the judge who complained about the failure to prosecute parents who brought their children north with smugglers. In February, Hanen issued a preliminary injunction against the President's plan. (The Obama Administration has filed an appeal.)

On the Saturday night following Obama's speech, Melida and Alfredo hosted a prayer circle in their living room. As Melida prepared horchata in a big



"Can you just once get to the damn point without the usual embellishments?"

aluminum pan, she reflected on what the reform measures could mean for the country's extortion epidemic. "The kidnappers thought they could do whatever they wanted," she said. Alfredo added, "No one does what we did"—seek out the police. For months, he had heard from colleagues and friends with their own stories of kidnaps for ransom, mostly endured in silence.

At around 7 P.M., nearly two dozen church friends arrived. A neighbor set up a table in the living room for the service, and couples squeezed onto two small couches or stood against the wall, their kids sprawling on the carpet. After a brief sermon on the theme of generosity, the members of the group stood to pray aloud, each adding private prayers to the collective swell.

Melida entered from the kitchen, murmuring a stream of benedictions that she'd begun reciting months before, as her children set off from Jalapa, and which she planned to carry forward always, wherever she found herself: a prayer—arms raised, head bowed—for teen-agers like Jefferson, gunned down by a masked man in Guatemala City; like Gilberto Francisco Ramos Juarez, who collapsed of heatstroke in the Texas

brush of the Rio Grande Valley on his journey north, his corpse found a few miles from where Brayan and Robinson had crossed weeks before; like Julio Cesar Cruz, who'd made it safely to Trenton from Guatemala's highlands, a few weeks earlier, only to be beaten to death in front of a deli, a spot that Melida had recently pointed out to her sons.

Soon the guests would go home, and the kids would scatter to Facebook and bingo. Melida and Alfredo would discuss contingency plans should the boys get deported—whether they'd uproot Kathryn and Jennifer and return to Guatemala City as a family. But, for this brief moment, the house still smelling of cinnamon, all six members of the Godoy family sat together.

"Psalm 37," the evening's prayer leader called out, and the family recited in unison, "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass." God, Alfredo later reflected, had found a way to return the warm jacket that he'd given up on his journey north. The stranger who had taken it had left him with a promise: "You're going to suffer, you're going to suffer a lot. But you're going to make it." ♦

THE MAN WHO BROKE THE MUSIC BUSINESS

The dawn of online piracy.

BY STEPHEN WITT

One Saturday in 1994, Bennie Lydell Glover, a temporary employee at the PolyGram compact-disk manufacturing plant in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, went to a party at the house of a co-worker. He was angling for a permanent position, and the party was a chance to network with his managers. Late in the evening, the host put on music to get people dancing. Glover, a fixture at clubs in Charlotte, an hour away, had never heard any of the songs before, even though many of them were by artists whose work he enjoyed.

Later, Glover realized that the host had been d.j.'ing with music that had been smuggled out of the plant. He was surprised. Plant policy required all permanent employees to sign a "No Theft Tolerated" agreement. He knew that the plant managers were concerned about leaking, and he'd heard of employees being arrested for embezzling inventory. But at the party, even in front of the supervisors, it seemed clear that the disks had been getting out. In time, Glover became aware of a far-reaching underground trade in pre-release disks. "We'd run them in the plant in the week, and they'd have them in the flea markets on the weekend," he said. "It was a real leaky plant."

The factory sat on a hundred acres of woodland and had more than three hundred thousand square feet of floor space. It ran shifts around the clock, every day of the year. New albums were released in record stores on Tuesdays, but they needed to be pressed, packaged, and shrink-wrapped weeks in advance. On a busy day, the plant produced a quarter of a million CDs. Its lineage was distinguished: PolyGram was a division of the Dutch consumer-electronics giant Philips, the co-inventor of the CD.

One of Glover's co-workers was Tony Dockery, another temporary hire. The two worked opposite ends of the shrink-

wrapping machine, twelve feet apart. Glover was a "dropper": he fed the packaged disks into the machine. Dockery was a "boxer": he took the shrink-wrapped jewel cases and stacked them in a cardboard box for shipping. The jobs paid about ten dollars an hour.

Glover and Dockery soon became friends. They lived in the same town, Shelby, and Glover started giving Dockery a ride to work. They liked the same music. They made the same money. Most important, they were both fascinated by computers, an unusual interest for two working-class Carolinians in the early nineties—the average Shelbyite was more likely to own a hunting rifle than a PC. Glover's father had been a mechanic, and his grandfather, a farmer, had moonlighted as a television repairman. In 1989, when Glover was fifteen, he went to Sears and bought his first computer: a twenty-three-hundred-dollar PC clone with a one-color monitor. His mother co-signed as the guarantor on the layaway plan. Tinkering with the machine, Glover developed an expertise in hardware assembly, and began to earn money fixing the computers of his friends and neighbors.

By the time of the party, he'd begun to experiment with the nascent culture of the Internet, exploring bulletin-board systems and America Online. Soon, Glover also purchased a CD burner, one of the first produced for home consumers. It cost around six hundred dollars. He began to make mixtapes of the music he already owned, and sold them to friends. "There was a lot of people down my way selling shoes, pocketbooks, CDs, movies, and fencing stolen stuff," he told me. "I didn't think they'd ever look at me for what I was doing." But the burner took forty minutes to make a single copy, and business was slow.

Glover began to consider selling leaked CDs from the plant. He knew a

couple of employees who were smuggling them out, and a pre-release album from a hot artist, copied to a blank disk, would be valuable. (Indeed, recording executives at the time saw this as a key business risk.) But PolyGram's offerings just weren't that good. The company had a dominant position in adult contemporary, but the kind of people who bought knockoff CDs from the trunk of a car didn't want Bryan Adams and Sheryl Crow. They wanted Jay Z, and the plant didn't have it.

By 1996, Glover, who went by Dell, had a permanent job at the plant, with higher pay, benefits, and the possibility of more overtime. He began working double shifts, volunteering for every available slot. "We wouldn't allow him to work more than six consecutive days," Robert Buchanan, one of his former managers, said. "But he would try."

The overtime earnings funded new purchases. In the fall of 1996, Hughes Network Systems introduced the country's first consumer-grade broadband satellite Internet access. Glover and Dockery signed up immediately. The service offered download speeds of up to four hundred kilobits per second, seven times that of even the best dial-up modem.

Glover left AOL behind. He soon found that the real action was in the chat rooms. Internet Relay Chat networks tended to be noncommercial, hosted by universities and private individuals and not answerable to corporate standards of online conduct. You created a username and joined a channel, indicated by a pound sign: #politics, #sex, #computers. Glover and Dockery became chat addicts; sometimes, even after spending the entire day together, they hung out in the same chat channel after work. On IRC, Dockery was St. James, or, sometimes,



Dell Glover manufactured CDs for a living, but he began to wonder: if the MP3 was just as good, why bother with the CD?

Jah Jah. And Glover was ADEG, or, less frequently, Darkman. Glover did not have a passport and hardly ever left the South, but IRC gave him the opportunity to interact with strangers from all over the world.

Also, he could share files. Online, pirated media files were known as “warez,” from “software,” and were distributed through a subculture dating back to at least 1980, which called itself the Warez Scene. The Scene was organized in loosely affiliated digital crews, which raced one another to be the first to put new material on the IRC channel. Software was often available on the same day that it was officially released. Sometimes it was even possible, by hacking company servers, or through an employee, to pirate a piece of software before it was available in stores. The ability to regularly source pre-release leaks earned one the ultimate accolade in digital piracy: to be among the “elite.”

By the mid-nineties, the Scene had moved beyond software piracy into magazines, pornography, pictures, and even fonts. In 1996, a Scene member with the screen name NetFraCk started

a new crew, the world’s first MP3 piracy group: Compress ‘Da Audio, or CDA, which used the newly available MP3 standard, a format that could shrink music files by more than ninety per cent. On August 10, 1996, CDA released to IRC the Scene’s first “officially” pirated MP3: “Until It Sleeps,” by Metallica. Within weeks, there were numerous rival crews and thousands of pirated songs.

Glover’s first visit to an MP3-trading chat channel came shortly afterward. He wasn’t sure what an MP3 was or who was making the files. He simply downloaded software for an MP3 player, and put in requests for the bots of the channel to serve him files. A few minutes later, he had a small library of songs on his hard drive.

One of the songs was Tupac Shakur’s “California Love,” the hit single that had become inescapable after Tupac’s death, several weeks earlier, in September, 1996. Glover loved Tupac, and when his album “All Eyez on Me” came through the PolyGram plant, in a special distribution deal with Interscope Records, he had even shrink-wrapped some of the disks. Now he

played the MP3 of “California Love.” Roger Troutman’s talk-box intro came rattling through his computer speakers, followed by Dr. Dre’s looped reworking of the piano hook from Joe Cocker’s “Woman to Woman.” Then came Tupac’s voice, compressed and digitized from beyond the grave, sounding exactly as it did on the CD.

At work, Glover manufactured CDs for mass consumption. At home, he had spent more than two thousand dollars on burners and other hardware to produce them individually. His livelihood depended on continued demand for the product. But Glover had to wonder: if the MP3 could reproduce Tupac at one-eleventh the bandwidth, and if Tupac could then be distributed, free, on the Internet, what the hell was the point of a compact disk?

In 1998, Seagram Company announced that it was purchasing PolyGram from Philips and merging it with the Universal Music Group. The deal comprised the global pressing and distribution network, including the Kings Mountain plant. The employees were nervous, but management told them not to worry; the plant wasn’t shutting down—it was expanding. The music industry was enjoying a period of unmatched profitability, charging more than fourteen dollars for a CD that cost less than two dollars to manufacture. The executives at Universal thought that this state of affairs was likely to continue. In the prospectus that they filed for the PolyGram acquisition, they did not mention the MP3 among the anticipated threats to the business.

The production lines were upgraded to manufacture half a million CDs a day. There were more shifts, more overtime hours, and more music. Universal, it seemed, had cornered the market on rap. Jay Z, Eminem, Dr. Dre, Cash Money—Glover packaged the albums himself.

Six months after the merger, Shawn Fanning, an eighteen-year-old college dropout from Northeastern University, debuted a public file-sharing platform he had invented called Napster. Fanning had spent his adolescence in the same IRC underground as Glover and Dockery, and was struck



“Look, the new emoji are here.”

by the inefficiency of its distribution methods. Napster replaced IRC bots with a centralized “peer-to-peer” server that allowed people to swap files directly. Within a year, the service had ten million users.

Before Napster, a leaked album had caused only localized damage. Now it was a catastrophe. Universal rolled out its albums with heavy promotion and expensive marketing blitzes: videos, radio spots, television campaigns, and appearances on late-night TV. The availability of pre-release music on the Internet interfered with this schedule, upsetting months of work by publicity teams and leaving the artists feeling betrayed.

Even before Napster’s launch, the plant had begun to implement a new anti-theft regimen. Steve Van Buren, who managed security at the plant, had been pushing for better safeguards since before the Universal merger, and he now instituted a system of randomized searches. Each employee was required to swipe a magnetized identification card upon leaving the plant. Most of the time, a green light appeared and the employee could leave. Occasionally, though, the card triggered a red light, and the employee was made to stand in place as a security guard ran a wand over his body, searching for the thin aluminum coating of a compact disk.

Van Buren succeeded in getting some of the flea-market bootleggers shut down. Plant management had heard of the technician who had been d.j.’ing parties with pre-release music, and Van Buren requested that he take a lie-detector test. The technician failed, and was fired. Even so, Glover’s contacts at the plant could still reliably get leaked albums. One had even sneaked out an entire manufacturing spindle of three hundred disks, and was selling them for five dollars each. But this was an exclusive trade, and only select employees knew who was engaged in it.

By this time, Glover had built a tower of seven CD burners, which stood next to his computer. He could produce about thirty copies an hour, which made bootlegging more profitable, so he scoured the other underground warez networks for material to sell: PlayStation games, PC applications,

MP3 files—anything that could be burned to a disk and sold for a few dollars.

He focussed especially on movies, which fetched five dollars each. New compression technology could shrink a feature film to fit on a single CD. The video quality was poor, but business was brisk, and soon he was buying blank CDs in bulk. He bought a label printer to catalogue his product, and a color printer to make mockups of movie posters. He filled a black nylon binder with images of the posters, and used it as a sales catalogue. He kept his inventory in the trunk of his Jeep and sold the movies out of his car.

Glover still considered it too risky to sell leaked CDs from the plant. Nevertheless, he enjoyed keeping up with current music, and the smugglers welcomed him as a customer. He was a permanent employee with no rap sheet and an interest in technology, but outside the plant he had a reputation as a roughrider. He owned a Japanese street-racing motorcycle, which he took to Black Bike Week, in Myrtle Beach. He had owned several handguns, and on his forearm was a tattoo of the Grim Reaper, walking a pit bull on a chain.

His co-worker Dockery, by contrast, was a clean-cut churchgoer, and too square for the smugglers. But he had started bootlegging, too, and he pestered Glover to supply him with leaked CDs. In addition, Dockery kept finding files online that Glover couldn’t: movies that were still in theatres, PlayStation games that weren’t scheduled to be released for months.

For a while, Glover traded leaked disks for Dockery’s software and movies. But eventually he grew tired of acting as Dockery’s courier, and asked why the disks were so valuable. Dockery invited him to his house one night, where he outlined the basics of the warez underworld. For the past year or so, he’d been uploading the pre-release leaks Glover gave him to a shadowy network of online enthusiasts. This was the Scene, and Dockery, on IRC, had joined one of its most elite groups: Rabid Neurosis, or RNS. (Dockery declined to comment for this story.)

Instead of pirating individual songs, RNS was pirating entire albums, bringing the pre-release mentality from software to music. The goal was to beat the

official release date whenever possible, and that meant a campaign of infiltration against the major labels.

The leader of RNS went by the handle Kali. He was a master of surveillance and infiltration, the Karla of music piracy. It seemed that he spent hours each week researching the confusing web of corporate acquisitions and pressing agreements that determined where and when CDs would be manufactured. With this information, he built a network of moles who, in the next eight years, managed to burrow into the supply chains of every major music label. “This stuff had to be his life, because he knew about all the release dates,” Glover said.

Dockery—known to Kali as St. James—was his first big break. According to court documents, Dockery encountered several members of RNS in a chat room, including Kali. Here he learned of the group’s desire for pre-release tracks. He soon joined RNS and became one of its best sources. But, when his family life began to interfere, he proposed that Glover take his place.

Glover hesitated: what was in it for him?

He learned that Kali was a gatekeeper to the secret “topsite” servers that formed the backbone of the Scene. The ultra-fast servers contained the best pirated media of every form. The Scene’s servers were well hidden, and log-ons were permitted only from pre-approved Internet addresses. The Scene controlled its inventory as tightly as Universal did—maybe tighter.

If Glover was willing to upload smuggled CDs from the plant to Kali, he’d be given access to these topsites, and he’d never have to pay for media again. He could hear the new Outkast album weeks before anyone else did. He could play Madden NFL on his PlayStation a month before it became available in stores. And he could get the same movies that had allowed Dockery to beat him as a bootlegger.

Dockery arranged a chat-room session for Glover and Kali, and the two exchanged cell-phone numbers. In their first call, Glover mostly just listened. Kali spoke animatedly, in a patois of geekspeak, California mellow, and slang borrowed from West Coast rap. He loved computers, but he also loved hip-hop,

and he knew all the beefs, all the disses, and all the details of the feuds among artists on different labels. He also knew that, in the aftermath of the murders of Tupac and the Notorious B.I.G., those feuds were dying down. Def Jam, Cash Money, and Interscope had all signed distribution deals with Universal. Kali's research kept taking him back to the Kings Mountain plant.

He and Glover hashed out the details of their partnership. Kali would track the release dates of upcoming albums and tell Glover which material he was interested in. Glover would acquire smuggled CDs from the plant. He would then rip the leaked CDs to the MP3 format and, using encrypted channels, send them to Kali's home computer. Kali packaged the MP3s according to the Scene's exacting technical standards and released them to its topsites.

The deal sounded good to Glover, but to fulfill Kali's requests he'd have to get new albums from the plant much more frequently, three or four times a week. This would be difficult. In addition to the randomized search gantlet, a fence had been erected around the parking lot. Emergency exits set off alarms. Laptop computers were forbidden in the plant, as were stereos, portable players, boom boxes, and anything else that might accept and read a CD.

Every once in a while, a marquee release would come through—"The Eminem Show," say, or Nelly's "Country Grammar." It arrived in a limousine with tinted windows, carried from the production studio in a briefcase by a courier who never let the master tape out of his sight. When one of these albums was pressed, Van Buren ordered wandings for every employee in the plant.

The CD-pressing machines were digitally controlled, and they generated error-proof records of their output. The shrink-wrapped disks were logged with an automated barcode scanner. The plant's management generated a report, tracking which CDs had been printed and which had actually shipped, and any discrepancy had to be accounted for. The plant might now press more than half a million cop-

ies of a popular album in a day, but the inventory could be tracked at the level of the individual disk.

Employees like Glover, who worked on the packaging line, had the upper hand when it came to smuggling CDs. Farther down the line and the disks would be bar-coded and logged in inventory; farther up and they wouldn't have access to the final product. By this time, the packaging line was becoming increasingly complex. The chief advantage of the compact disk over the MP3 was the satisfaction of owning a physical object. Universal was really selling packaging. Album art had become ornate. The disks were gold or fluorescent, the jewel cases were opaque blue or purple, and the album sleeves were thick booklets printed on high-quality paper. Dozens, sometimes hundreds, of extra disks were now being printed for every run, to be used as replacements in case any were damaged during packaging.

At the end of each shift, employees put the overstock disks into scrap bins. These scrap bins were later taken to a plastics grinder, where the disks were destroyed. Over the years, Glover had dumped hundreds of perfectly good disks into the bins, and he knew that the grinder had no memory and generated no records. If there were twenty-four disks and only twenty-three made it into the grinder's feed slot, no one in accounting would know.

So, on the way from the conveyor belt to the grinder, an employee could take off his surgical glove while holding a disk. He could wrap the glove around the disk and tie it off. He could then hide the disk, leaving everything else to be destroyed. At the end of his shift, he could return and grab the disk.

That still left the security guards. But here, too, there were options. One involved belt buckles. They were the signature fashion accessories of small-town North Carolina. Many people at the plant wore them—big oval medallions with the Stars and Bars on them. Gilt-leaf plates embroidered with fake diamonds that spelled out the word "BOSS." Western-themed cowboy buckles with longhorn skulls and gold trim. The buckles al-

ways set off the wand, but the guards wouldn't ask anyone to take them off.

Hide the disk inside the glove; hide the glove inside a machine; retrieve the glove and tuck it into your waistband; cinch your belt so tight it hurts your bladder; position your oversized belt buckle in front of the disk; cross your fingers as you shuffle toward the turnstile; and, if you get flagged, play it very cool when you set off the wand.

From 2001 on, Glover was the world's leading leaker of pre-release music. He claims that he never smuggled the CDs himself. Instead, he tapped a network of low-paid temporary employees, offering cash or movies for leaked disks. The handoffs took place at gas stations and convenience stores far from the plant. Before long, Glover earned a promotion, which enabled him to schedule the shifts on the packaging line. If a prized release came through the plant, he had the power to ensure that his man was there.

The pattern of label consolidation had led to a stream of hits at Universal's factory. Weeks before anyone else, Glover had the hottest albums of the year. He ripped the albums on his PC with software that Kali had sent, and then uploaded the files to him. The two made weekly phone calls to schedule the timing of the leaks.

Glover left the distribution to Kali. Unlike many Scene members, he didn't participate in technical discussions about the relative merits of constant and variable bit rates. He listened to the CDs, but he often grew bored after only one or two plays. When he was done with a disk, he stashed it in a black duffelbag in his bedroom closet.

By 2002, the duffelbag held more than five hundred disks, including nearly every major release to have come through the Kings Mountain plant. Glover leaked Lil Wayne's "500 Degreez" and Jay Z's "The Blueprint." He leaked Queens of the Stone Age's "Rated R" and 3 Doors Down's "Away from the Sun." He leaked Björk. He leaked Ashanti. He leaked Ja Rule. He leaked Nelly. He leaked Blink-182's "Take Off Your Pants and Jacket."

Glover didn't have access to big-tent mom-rock artists like Celine Dion and Cher. But his albums tended to be the most sought after in the demographic



that mattered: generation Eminem. The typical Scene participant was a computer-obsessed male, between the ages of fifteen and thirty. Kali—whose favorite artists included Ludacris, Jay Z, and Dr. Dre—was the perfect example. For Glover, the high point of 2002 came in May, when he leaked “The Eminem Show” twenty-five days before its official release. The leak made its way from the Scene’s topsites to public peer-to-peer networks within hours, and, even though the album became the year’s best-seller, Eminem was forced to bump up its release date.

Every Scene release was accompanied by an NFO (from “info”), an ASCII-art text file that served as the releasing group’s signature tag. NFO files were a way for Scene crews to brag about their scores, shout out important associates, and advertise to potential recruits. Rabid Neurosis NFOs were framed by psychedelic smoke trails emanating from a marijuana leaf at the bottom:

TEAM RNS PRESENTS
ARTIST: Eminem
TITLE: The Eminem Show
LABEL: Aftermath
RIPPER: Team RNS
192 kbps-Rap
1hr 17min total-111.6 mb
RELEASE DATE: 2002-06-04
RIP DATE: 2002-05-10

The most important line was the rip date, which emphasized the timeliness of the leak. Kali drafted many of the release notes himself, in a sarcastic tone, often taunting rival releasing groups. “The Eminem Show” NFO ended with a question: “Who else did you think would get this?”

Who *was* Kali? Glover wasn’t sure, but as their relationship evolved he picked up some clues. Kali’s 818 area code was from the Los Angeles region. The voice in the background that Glover sometimes heard on the calls sounded as if it might be Kali’s mother. There was also the marijuana leaf that served as RNS’s official emblem: Glover thought he could tell when Kali was high. Most striking was the exaggerated hip-hop swagger that Kali affected. He only ever referred to Glover as “D.” No one else called him that.

“He would try to talk, like, with a slang,” Glover told me. “Kinda cool, kinda hard.” Glover suspected that Kali



“We couldn’t find a raw-vegan, gluten-free, sugar-free, non-G.M.O. cake for your birthday, so we got you nothing.”

wasn’t black, though he sensed that he probably wasn’t white, either.

Glover was not permitted to interact with the other members of the group, not even the one who served as the “ripping coordinator.” His online handle was RST, and his name was Simon Tai. A second-generation Chinese immigrant, Tai was brought up in Southern California before arriving at the University of Pennsylvania, in 1997. As a freshman with a T1 Internet connection, he’d been in awe of RNS. After hanging around in the chat channel for nearly a year, he was asked to join.

He also applied for a slot as a d.j. at the school’s radio station. For two years, Kali cultivated Tai’s interest in rap music and told him to make connections with the promotional people at various labels. In 2000, Tai, now a senior at Penn, was promoted to music director at the station and given a key to the office, where he had access to the station’s promo disks. Every day, he checked the station’s mail; when something good came in, he raced back to his dorm room to upload it. Beating rival Scene crews was sometimes a matter of seconds.

Tai scored two major leaks that year, Ludacris’s “Back for the First Time” and Outkast’s “Stankonia.” With his Scene credentials established, for the next two years Tai managed RNS’s roster of leakers. Along with Kali, he tracked the major labels’ distribution schedules and directed his sources to keep an eye out for certain albums.

To find the albums, RNS had international contacts at every level, who went by anonymous online handles. According to court testimony and interviews with Scene members, there were the radio d.j.s: BiDi, in the South; DJ Rhino, in the Midwest. There was the British music journalist who went by KSD, whose greatest coup was 50 Cent’s “lost” debut, “Power of the Dollar,” scheduled for release in 2000 by Columbia, but cancelled after the rapper was shot. There was DaLive1, a house-music aficionado who lived in New York City, and used his connections inside Viacom to source leaks from Black Entertainment Television and MTV. There were two Italian brothers sharing the handle Incuboy, who claimed to run a music-promotion business and had reliable

access to releases from Sony and Bertelsmann. In Japan, albums sometimes launched a week or two ahead of the U.S. release date, often with bonus tracks, and Tai relied on kewl21 and x23 to source them. Finally, there were the Tuesday rippers, like Aflex and Ziggy, who spent their own money to buy music legally the day that it appeared in stores.

The only leaker Tai didn't manage was Glover—Kali kept his existence a secret, even from the other members of the group. Glover resented the isolation, but being Kali's private source was worth the trouble. At any given time, global Scene membership amounted to no more than a couple of thousand people. Kali was close to the top. A typical Scene pirate, bribing record-store employees and cracking software, might be granted access to three or four topsites. By 2002, Glover had access to two dozen.

His contacts made him an incomparable movie bootlegger. He built another tower to replace the first, with burners for DVDs instead of CDs. He upgraded his Internet connection from satellite to cable. He downloaded the past few years' most popular movies from the topsites, then burned a couple of dozen copies of each. Expanding his customer base beyond his co-workers, he started meeting people in the parking lot of a nearby conve-

nience store. Around Cleveland County, Glover became known as "the movie man." For five dollars, he would sell you a DVD of "Spider-Man" weeks before it was available at Blockbuster, sometimes even while it was still in theatres.

Glover started selling between two hundred and three hundred DVDs a week, frequently making more than a thousand dollars in cash. He built a second PC and another burn tower to keep up with demand. He knew that this was illegal, but he felt certain that he had insulated himself from suspicion. All transactions were hand to hand, no records were kept, and he never deposited his earnings in the bank. He didn't sell music, DVDs weren't made at the Universal plant, and he was sure that his customers had never heard of the Scene.

Scene culture drew a distinction between online file-sharing and for-profit bootlegging. The topsites were seen as a morally permissible system of trade. Using them for the physical bootlegging of media, by contrast, was viewed as a serious breach of ethical principles. Worse, it was known to attract the attention of the law. Kali put the word out that anyone suspected of selling material from the topsites would be kicked out of the group. Thus, for most participants membership in RNS was a money-losing proposition. They spent hundreds of dollars a year on compact disks, and

thousands on servers and broadband, and got only thrills in return.

Glover was an exception: he knew that he wouldn't be kicked out of anything. With Universal's rap acts ascending, Kali needed Glover.

Napster lasted barely two years, in its original incarnation, but at its peak the service claimed more than seventy million registered accounts, with users sharing more than two billion MP3 files a month. Music piracy became to the early two-thousands what drug experimentation had been to the late nineteen-sixties: a generation-wide flouting of both social norms and the existing body of law, with little thought for consequences. In late 1999, the Recording Industry Association of America, the music business's trade and lobbying group, sued Napster, claiming that the company was facilitating copyright infringement on an unprecedented scale. Napster lost the lawsuit, appealed, and lost again. In July, 2001, facing a court order to stop enabling the trade of copyrighted files, Napster shut down its service.

That legal victory achieved little. Former users of Napster saw Internet file-sharing as an undeniable prerogative, and instead of returning to the record stores they embraced gray-market copycats of Napster, like Kazaa and Limewire. By 2003, global recording-industry revenues had fallen from their millennial peak by more than fifteen per cent. The losing streak continued for the next decade.

The R.I.A.A. tried to reassert the primacy of the industry's copyrights. But civil suits against the peer-to-peer services took years to move through the appeals courts, and the R.I.A.A.'s policy of suing individual file-sharers was a public-relations disaster. To some at the music labels, Congress seemed disinclined to help. Harvey Geller, Universal's chief litigator, spent years futilely petitioning legislators for better enforcement of copyright law. "Politicians pander to their constituents," Geller said. "And there were more constituents stealing music than constituents selling it."

Leaking was viewed differently. No one was advocating for the smuggler. So album leakers adhered to a rigid code of silence. Scene groups were the



"A lot of them I only pretend to watch over."

source for almost all of the new releases available on the peer-to-peer networks, but most file-sharers didn't even suspect their existence. Civil litigation against such actors was impossible: unlike Kazaa, RNS did not have a business address to which a subpoena could be sent. Only criminal prosecutions would work.

In January, 2003, Glover leaked 50 Cent's official debut, "Get Rich or Die Tryin'," to Kali. It became the best-selling U.S. album of the year. He followed that up with albums from Jay Z, G Unit, Mary J. Blige, Big Tymers, and Ludacris, and then began the following year with Kanye West's debut, "The College Dropout." After a scare, in which Glover worried that a release might be traced to him, the timing of leaks became more and more a point of focus. Glover's leaks began to hit the Internet about two weeks before the CDs were due in stores, neither so early that the leak could be traced to the plant nor so late that RNS risked being bested by other pirates.

The group's ascendancy came during a period of heightened scrutiny by law enforcement. In April, 2004, the F.B.I. and foreign law-enforcement agencies conducted coordinated raids in eleven countries, identifying more than a hundred pirates. The R.I.A.A.'s anti-piracy unit was staffed with investigators, who hung around the chat rooms of the Scene and learned its language. They tried to infiltrate the Scene, and tracked the leaked material and its dissemination throughout the Internet. Their research began to point them to one increasingly powerful crew, RNS, and they shared their findings with the F.B.I.

Journalists poked around the fringes of the Scene, too. A December, 2004, article in *Rolling Stone*, by Bill Werde, introduced RNS to the general public. A photo caption in the piece read, "In a four-day period, one group leaked CDs by U2, Eminem and Destiny's Child." The article quoted a source close to Eminem: "The rapper's camp believes Encore was leaked when it went to the distributors, who deliver albums from the pressing plants to chain stores such as Wal-Mart."

The information was wrong. The CD hadn't come from the distributor;

it had come from Glover. Three days later, he leaked the U2 album "How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb." (Destiny's Child's "Destiny Fulfilled" had come from elsewhere.) Facing increased attention, Kali decided to strip the group's NFO files of potentially identifying information; from now on, they would consist only of the date that the album was ripped and the date that it was due in stores.

Kali ordered the RNS chat channel moved from the public IRC servers to a private computer in Hawaii. He instructed members to communicate only through this channel, which was encrypted, banning methods like AOL Instant Messenger. And he reasserted the prohibition against physical bootlegging. But Glover refused to follow the Scene's rules. He used I.M. whenever he felt like it, and kept his duffelbag of leaked CDs in his closet. He wasn't as interested in music anymore, or in earning Brownie points from some Internet group. All he cared about was topsites. The more he could join, the more leaked movies he could get, and the more DVDs he could sell.

In a good week, Glover on his own might sell three hundred disks, and make fifteen hundred dollars in cash. Now he began to branch out. At the beginning of each week, he dropped off four hundred disks at each of three trusted barbershops in Shelby. At the end of the week, he returned to collect his share of the profits—roughly six hundred dollars a week per shop. His best salesman made more selling bootleg movies than he did cutting hair. Seeing the profits Glover was earning, other bootleggers began moving into his territory. But Glover retained a pronounced edge. "I had access to so much stuff," he said. "No one on the street could beat me."

Many of Glover's best customers worked at the plant, and for those he trusted most he devised an even better deal. Rather than paying five dollars per movie, for twenty dollars a month you could buy an unlimited subscription—and you didn't even need the disks. Glover had set up his own

topsite, and once you'd bought an account you could download anything you wanted. There were current DVDs, plus the latest copies of games, music, software, and more. At the time, video on demand was the technology of the future, but, if you knew Glover, it had already arrived. He was running a private Netflix out of his house.

Glover began to make extravagant purchases. He bought game consoles and presents for his friends and his family. He bought a new off-road quad bike, then a second. He bought a used Lincoln Navigator, and upgraded it with xenon headlights, a hood scoop, and an expensive stereo. For years, rappers had favored rims called "spinners"—metal hubcaps on independent bearings, which continued rotating even when the car had stopped. Looking to switch up the game, Glover bought "floaters": the weighted rims stood still even when the wheels were moving.



In 2005, RNS leaked four of the five best-selling albums in the U.S. The No. 1 and No. 2 slots were occupied by Mariah Carey's "The Emancipation of Mimi" and 50 Cent's "The Massacre," and Glover had leaked them both. RNS leaks quickly made their way onto public file-sharing networks, and, within forty-eight hours of appearing on the topsites, copies of the smuggled CDs could be found on iPods across the globe.

By the end of 2006, Glover had leaked nearly two thousand CDs. He was no longer afraid of getting caught. Universal had sold its compact-disk-manufacturing holdings, which allowed the company to watch the deterioration of physical media from a comfortable distance. Although still on contract to print music for Universal, the new ownership treated the plant like a wasting asset, and stopped investing in maintenance. The musicians signed to Universal complained constantly of album leaks, but the label's supply chain was as insecure as ever.

Although RNS was still wildly successful, many of its members were tiring of its activities. When the group started,

in 1996, most of the participants were teen-agers. Now they were approaching thirty, and the glamour was fading. They outgrew their jobs at college radio stations or found more lucrative fields than music journalism, and lost their access to advance albums.

Listening to hundreds of new releases a year could lead to a kind of cynicism. The musicians all used Auto-Tune to pitch-correct their voices; the songwriters all copied the last big hit; the same producers worked on every track. Glover didn't connect with rap in the way that he used to. Tony Dockery had been born again, and listened primarily to gospel. Simon Tai still hung around the chat channel, but he hadn't leaked an album in years. Even Kali seemed a little bored.

Glover had been thinking about retiring from the Scene. He started leaking when he was in his mid-twenties. He was now thirty-two. He had worn the same haircut for ten years, and dressed in the same screen-print T-shirts and bluejeans, but his perception of himself was changing. He didn't remember why he had been so attracted to street bikes, or why he'd felt it necessary to own a handgun. He found his Grim Reaper tattoo impossibly stupid.

Glover's DVD profits began to decline. Leaks from the Scene were now publicly available within seconds of being posted to the topsites, and even those who were technologically challenged could figure out how to download them. Within a couple of years, Glover's income from bootlegging dropped to a few hundred dollars a week.

Glover began to make his feelings known to Kali. "We've been doing this shit for a long time," he said in a phone call. "We never got caught. Maybe it's time to stop." Surprisingly, Kali agreed. Though the plant's security was increasingly loose, the risks for leakers were greater. Between foreign law enforcement, the F.B.I., and the R.I.A.A.'s internal anti-piracy squads, there were multiple teams of investigators working to catch them. Kali understood the lengths to which law enforcement was willing to go. Some of the targets of the 2004 raids were his friends, and he had visited them in federal prison.

Then, in January of 2007, one of RNS's topsites mysteriously vanished. The server, which was hosted in Hungary, began re-

fusing all connections, and the company that owned it didn't respond. Kali ordered the group shut down. RNS's final leak, released on January 19, 2007, was Fall Out Boy's "Infinity on High," sourced from inside the plant by Glover.

Dozens of former members flooded into the chat channel to pay their respects. Dockery, logging in as St. James, started changing his handle, over and over, in tribute to former members. "Even if we quit now, I'll think about it always," Kali wrote. "I don't know about you guys, but why keep taking a chance." Soon afterward, the RNS channel was closed forever.

Within months, Glover was once again leaking CDs from the plant, to a guy he knew as RickOne, a leader in a Scene releasing group called OSC. Though this was no longer as profitable for Glover, his desire for free media was undiminished. "To know that I could be playing Madden two months before the stores even had it—to me, that was heaven," Glover told me.

Kali wasn't able to give up, either. After RNS was shut down, he had continued sourcing and leaking albums, attributing the leaks to nonsense three-letter acronyms that bewildered even Scene veterans. In the summer of 2007, he contacted Glover and told him that there were two more leaks they had to have: new albums by 50 Cent and Kanye West, both with the same release date. The rappers were competing over whose album would sell more copies, and the feud had made the cover of *Rolling Stone*. 50 Cent said that if he didn't win he would retire.

But, as Kali probably knew better than anyone, both artists were distributed and promoted by Universal. What looked like an old-school hip-hop beef was actually a publicity stunt designed to boost sales, and Kali was determined to get involved. RNS had leaked every release the artists had ever put out, and going after 50's "Curtis" and Kanye's "Graduation" was a matter of tradition.

The official release date was September 11, 2007, but the albums were first pressed at the plant in mid-August. Glover obtained them through his smuggling network and listened to both. "Graduation" was an ambitious marriage of pop rap and high art, sampling widely from sources as diverse as krautrock and French house music, with cover art

by Takashi Murakami. "Curtis" played it safer, favoring hard-thumping club music anchored by hits like "I Get Money" and "Ayo Technology."

Glover enjoyed both albums, but he was in an unusual position: he had the power to influence the outcome of this feud. If he leaked "Graduation" and held on to "Curtis," Kanye might sell fewer records. But if he leaked "Curtis" and held on to "Graduation"—well, he might make 50 Cent retire.

Glover decided that he would release one album through Kali and the other through RickOne. He offered RickOne the Kanye West album. On August 30, 2007, "Graduation" hit the topsites of the Scene, with OSC taking credit for the leak. Within hours, an anguished Kali called Glover, who told him that he wasn't sure how it had happened. He said that he hadn't seen the album at the plant yet. But, he said, "Curtis" had just arrived. On September 4, 2007, Kali released "Curtis" to the Scene.

Universal officially released the albums on Tuesday, September 11th. Despite the leaks, both sold well. "Curtis" sold almost seven hundred thousand copies in its first week, "Graduation" nearly a million. Kanye won the sales contest, even though Glover had leaked his album first. He'd just run a controlled experiment on the effects of leaking on music sales, an experiment that suggested that, at least in this case, the album that was leaked first actually did better. But Glover was happy with the outcome. "Graduation" had grown on him. He liked Kanye's album, and felt that he deserved his victory. And 50 didn't retire after all.

On Wednesday, September 12th, Glover went to work at 7 P.M. He had a double shift lined up, lasting through the night. He finished at 7 A.M. As he was preparing to leave, a co-worker pulled him aside. "There's someone out there hanging around your truck," he said.

In the dawn light, Glover saw three men in the parking lot. As he approached his truck, he pulled the key fob out of his pocket. The men stared at him but didn't move. Then he pressed the remote, the truck chirped, and the men drew their guns and told him to put his hands in the air.

The men were from the Cleveland County sheriff's office. They informed Glover that the F.B.I. was currently

searching his house; they had been sent to retrieve him.

In his front yard, half a dozen F.B.I. agents in bulletproof vests were milling around. Glover's door had been forced open, and agents were carting away the thousands of dollars' worth of technology purchases he'd made over the years. He found an F.B.I. special agent named Peter Vu waiting for him inside.

Vu, a veteran of the bureau's computer-crimes division, had spent years searching for the source of the leaks that were crippling the music industry. His efforts had finally led him to this unremarkable ranch house in small-town North Carolina. He introduced himself, then began pressing Glover for information. Vu was particularly interested in Kali, and Glover gave him the scattered details he had picked up over the years. But Vu wanted Kali's real name, and, although Glover had talked on the phone with Kali hundreds of times, he didn't know it.

The next day, Kali called Glover. His voice was agitated and nervous.

"It's me," Kali said. "Listen, I think the Feds might be onto us."

Vu had anticipated the possibility of such a call and had instructed Glover to act as if nothing had happened. Glover now had a choice to make. He could play dumb, and further the investigation of Kali. Or he could warn him off.

"You're too late," Glover said. "They hit me yesterday. Shut it down."

"O.K., I got you," Kali said. Then he said, "I appreciate it," and hung up.

In the next few months, the F.B.I. made numerous raids, picking up Rick-One, of OSC, and several members of RNS. They also found the man they believed to be Kali, the man who had cost the music industry tens of millions of dollars and transformed RNS into the most sophisticated piracy operation in history: Adil R. Cassim, a twenty-nine-year-old Indian-American I.T. worker who smoked weed, listened to rap music, and lived at home in the suburbs of Los Angeles with his mother.

On September 9, 2009, Glover arrived at the federal courthouse in Alexandria, Virginia, and was indicted on one count of felony conspiracy to commit copyright infringement. At his indictment, Glover saw Adil Cassim for the first time. Cassim was clean-shaven and wore his hair cropped short. He was



"It takes a while for technological advances to benefit everybody equally."

stocky, with a noticeable paunch, and was dressed in a black suit.

A month later, Glover pleaded guilty to the charge. The decision to plead was a difficult one, but Glover thought that his chances of acquittal were poor. In exchange for sentencing leniency, he agreed to testify against Cassim. The F.B.I. needed the help; the agency had thoroughly searched Cassim's residence, and a forensic team had inspected his laptop, but they had found no pre-release music. Cassim did not admit to being a member of RNS, though two pieces of physical evidence suggested a connection to the group. One was a burned compact disk taken from his bedroom, containing a copy of Cassim's résumé, on which, in the "Properties" tab, Microsoft Word had automatically included the name of the document's author: Kali. The second was Cassim's mobile phone, which contained Glover's cell number. The contact's name was listed only as "D."

Cassim's trial began in March, 2010, and lasted for five days. Glover testified, as did several other confessed members of RNS, along with a number of F.B.I. agents and technical experts. In the previous ten years, the federal government had prosecuted hundreds of Scene participants, and had won nearly every case it had brought. But on March 19, 2010, after a short period of deliberation, a jury found Cassim not guilty.

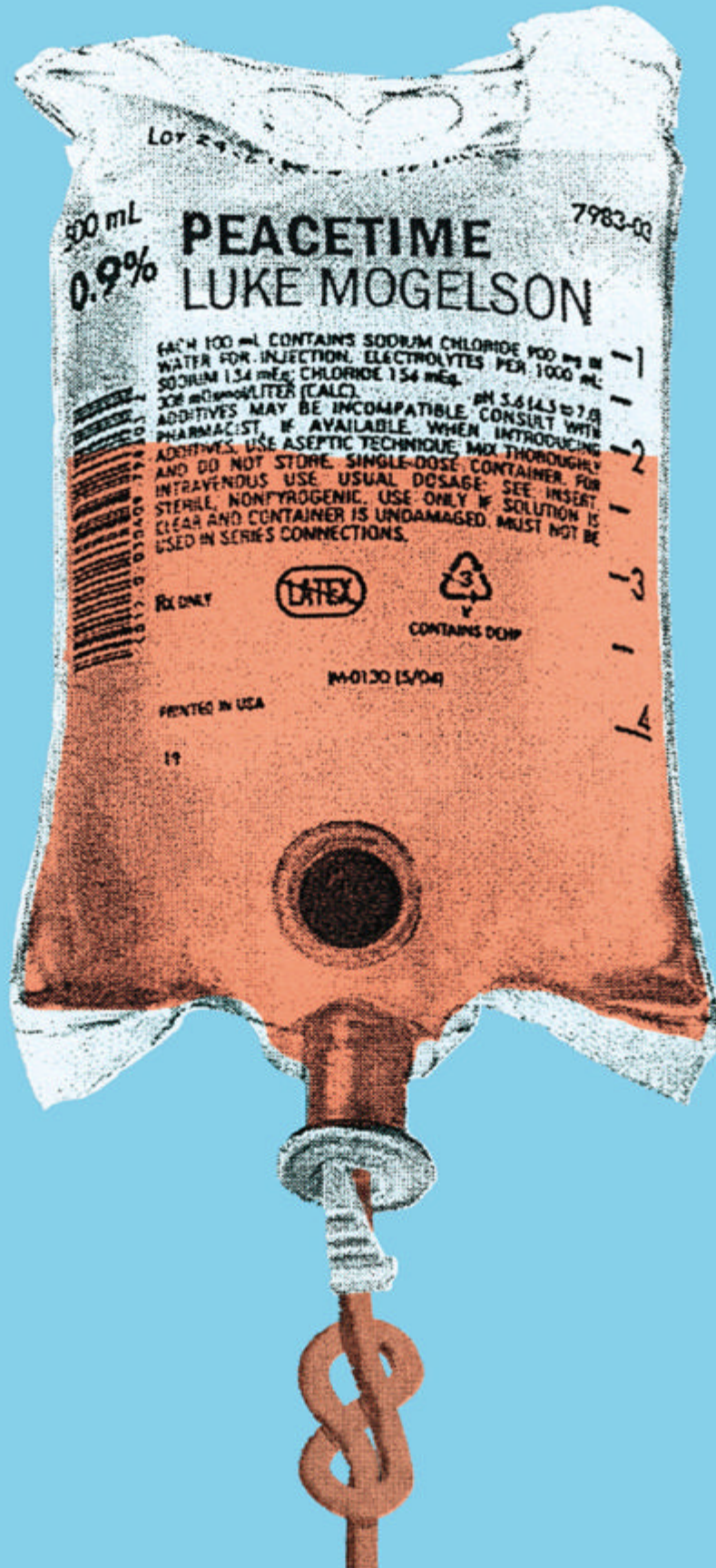
After the trial, Glover began to regret his decision to testify and to plead

guilty. He wondered if, with a better legal defense, he, too, might have been acquitted. He'd never been sure exactly what damage leaking music actually caused the musicians, and at times he seemed to regard it as something less than a crime.

"Look at 50 Cent," he said. "He's still living in Mike Tyson's house. Ain't nobody in the world that can hurt them." He continued, "It's a loss, but it's also a form of advertising." He paused. "But they probably lost more than they gained." In the end, Glover served three months in prison. (Tony Dockery also pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit copyright infringement, and spent three months in prison. Simon Tai was never charged with any wrongdoing.)

In their sentencing guidelines, the attorneys for the Department of Justice wrote, "RNS was the most pervasive and infamous Internet piracy group in history." In eleven years, RNS leaked more than twenty thousand albums. For much of this time, the group's best asset was Glover—there was scarcely a person younger than thirty who couldn't trace music in his or her collection to him.

On the day that Glover's home was raided, F.B.I. agents confiscated his computers, his duplicating towers, his hard drives, and his PlayStation. They took a few pictures of the albums he'd collected over the years, but they left the duffelbag full of compact disks behind—even as evidence, they were worthless. ♦



I was living in the armory on Lexington Avenue. First Sergeant Diaz had given me the keys. I slept on a cot in the medical-supply closet. "Two weeks, max," I'd told Diaz. But as the months went by I kept postponing a reunion with my wife. I was comfortable where I was. The armory took up an entire city block. There were secret passageways, subterranean firing ranges, a gym with an elliptical. At night, if drunk, I connected to a bag of saline. I always woke up hydrated. I never had a hangover.

It was peacetime, more or less. It was for us, the New York National Guard, at least. Between drills, I worked as a paramedic for a hospital in Queens. My partner on the ambulance, Karen, had applied to the police academy. She wanted to be a detective. This, for me, was troublesome: as a rule, from every residence we visited I took stuff. Not valuable stuff. Small stuff. A spoon, say, or a refrigerator magnet. I'd never been caught. Still, ever since she sat for the civil-service exam Karen had been acting leery. Once, while checking for prescriptions in a diabetic man's bathroom, I came across a plastic hand mirror, pink with black polka dots. I was about to shove it down my pants when I glimpsed Karen in its glass. (I brought it to my face, scrutinizing nose hairs.)

Often, when I got back to midtown, Diaz would still be there. Most nights, I'd find him in his office, updating his conspiracy blog. "Take a look at this, Papadopoulos," he'd say, turning his laptop around to show me a 3-D engineering schematic of Two World Trade Center, mid-collapse, with complex mathematical equations and swooping arrows indicating various structural details. "Huh," I'd say. Then we'd head to a bar on Third Avenue. Diaz, in his uniform, with his limp, almost always met a woman. The limp was gold. As the woman watched Diaz hobble back to us with drinks, sloshing gin and tonic on the floor, I'd say, "Fucking Iraq." She'd seldom ask me to elaborate. If she did, I wouldn't tell her how, as a squad leader, Diaz contracted a bacterial infection while masturbating in a Port-a-John; how the infection spread up his urethra, into his testi-

cles; how that made him lurch, causing a herniated disk, which resulted in sciatica.

Instead, I'd say, "We lost a lot of good men over there." Which happened to be true.

If it had been up to Diaz, he'd have let me move my flat screen and futon into the supply closet. The problem was the new C.O. After shepherding the unit through 9/11, Baghdad, and Afghanistan, our old C.O., Captain Harris, had recently been promoted to brigade staff, in Syracuse. His replacement, Captain Finkbiner, was a former marine determined to show us guardsmen how a real infantry company did things. He had the kind of face that a shaved head did not flatter; the effect was less soldier, more chemo. Shortly after he assumed command, Finkbiner summoned me to his office, and I had the momentary notion—seeing him there in Captain Harris's chair, behind Captain Harris's desk, wearing Captain Harris's rank—that he was a terminal case whose Make-A-Wish had been to be Captain Harris.

"Papadopoulos," he said. "What is that?"

"My name," I said.

"Cute," Finkbiner said. "So now I know who the joker is. The jackass. The clown."

There were no pictures of Mrs. Finkbiner on the desk, no baby Finkbiners. The sole decoration was a large mammalian jawbone, like a boomerang with teeth. I barely glanced at it. With a weary sigh, as if under pressure to share a story he'd rather have kept private, Finkbiner said, "All right, Jesus, O.K.," and proceeded to explain that on his last tour in Helmand Province he'd been leading a patrol when a camel walked out from the trees. Twisting its neck, the animal regarded the marines. Then it turned and sauntered toward them. It was about halfway to Finkbiner, about thirty metres out, when, boom, no more camel.

"Understand, Clown?"

I smiled politely. In fact, I hadn't really been listening. My own thoughts wanted attending. Just what was the age limit for those wishes, anyway? Were there people out there, afflicted

people, who'd missed the cutoff by a week? A day?

It was something someone should look into.

There was an old Polish lady, Mrs. Olenski, who called 911 every Wednesday. She usually called during Tour Two, my and Karen's shift. I looked forward to Wednesdays: first, because Mrs. Olenski always offered me oatmeal-raisin cookies; second, because she was extremely rude to Karen. The ritual started when her husband died. They'd been married for more than fifty years, no children. After Mr. Olenski went, the empty, silent apartment began to harrow Mrs. Olenski. Only the television helped. She left it on 24/7, full volume; it made no difference what channel or program. It made no difference because Mrs. Olenski hated television. The advertisements, the laughter—ridiculous. Every time we showed up, she switched it off, massaged her temples with her knotty finger bones, and muttered, "Thank God." Then, as soon as we were out the door, on it went again.

Her standard complaint was chest pain. I'd sit her on the gray suède couch, pull up the ottoman, and go through the motions: take her pulse and blood pressure, conduct a thorough medical history, provide oxygen. Meanwhile, Karen would stand off to the side, refusing to assist. Her feeling was that Mrs. Olenski abused the system and exploited city resources, and that I, by humoring her and eating her cookies, was complicit. Alive to Karen's judgment, Mrs. Olenski directed all her old-lady kindness to me, sometimes ignoring Karen altogether, at other times behaving toward her with overt hostility. Once, while Velcroing the B.P. cuff around her arm (on that arm, you had to use the pediatric cuff), I noticed her finger writing something on the couch cushion, smoothing down the nap. For a moment, I thought that she'd suffered a stroke and wanted to convey the fact to me. I checked her face for droop. When I looked back at the message, it read "whor."

Later, in the bus, Karen said, "You think you're being a good person, but

you're not. What you're being is afraid. You're afraid that's you."

She was in the driver's seat, one hand draped on the wheel, the other gloved by a bag of jalapeño Combos. Someday she was going to make a fine detective.

"You should lay off the Combos," I said.

"Don't cut my leathers," Karen said.

Don't cut my leathers. Years before, we'd responded to a motor-vehicle accident on the B.Q.E. Law enforcement had cordoned off a lane. A snaking peel of tread led to a motorcycle wedged beneath the guardrail. A man writhed in a slick of blood. Somehow he'd managed to slide, rather than tumble, over the asphalt. Both buttocks were gone. While Karen prepped the stretcher and applied the collar, I got out my trauma shears. Until then, the guy had been only semiconscious, murmuring, in a daze, "My ass, man, my fucking ass." Soon as I squeezed the scissors, though, he started, looked back at me, and said it.

"Don't cut my leathers."

After that, all the paramedics on Tour Two, and most of the nurses in the E.R., adopted the phrase. Its meaning was elastic. I often invoked it when the supervisor made us pull a double. Other instances included the time when we had to extricate an unrespon-

sive three-hundred-pounder from his bathtub in a fifth-floor studio, then found the elevator broken; when a girl who'd stuck a Beretta in her mouth and pulled the trigger, her tongue stud having deflected the bullet straight down through the bottom of her chin, asked us were we angels; and when Karen, after a gas explosion in a textile factory, sneaked up behind me, whispered in my ear, "I'm keeping an eye on you," and actually had an eye on me, on my shoulder, the nerve dangling like spaghetti. Some occasions, I didn't say it but I thought it. Take, for instance, the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund requesting documentation of my alleged pulmonary disease, my wife suggesting I have a think about our marriage, or Finkbiner inviting me, with great ceremony, to touch his lucky camel bone. Take me recalling all the homes I'd visited, the misery inside them, the knickknacks I'd lifted.

Mostly knickknacks. Every now and then I overreached. Once, at the Ridgedale Projects, we found a teen-age boy in a hoodie standing outside a red brick tower, wearing headphones and blowing bubblegum bubbles.

"Did you call 911?" Karen asked.

The boy shook his head. We'd al-

ready reached the elevator when he said, "Mom did."

On the way up, Karen said, "Is it your dad?"

"Sort of," the boy said.

A grossly overweight woman wearing a terry-cloth bathrobe over a diaphanous nightgown over a brownish sweatsuit greeted us in the hall. "Done it again," she said. We followed her into a cluttered apartment, where she began leisurely picking up toys off the floor, clucking with annoyance every time she bent over. Children watched an action film. None turned to look at us.

The man was in the bedroom, supine on the covers. He was unusually small—his underwear, which was all he had on, looked baggy, diaperish—unconscious, and experiencing severe respiratory depression. Every ten seconds or so, he'd snort a gnarly breath through his nose, a terrific snore. His lips were blue, his skin devoid of oxygenated flush. The nightstand was covered with pill bottles: mostly painkillers, a lot of opioids.

"For my aches," the woman explained. "But did he think about that, either?"

Karen went around to the far side of the bed with the O₂ and the oropharyngeal airway. When she planted her knee on the mattress to lean over the man, the mattress gave beneath her, billowing out in liquid undulations, lifting him on its squishy swell. Karen pitched forward and the water continued to glug from one side of the bed to the other, raising and dropping her, the man. Ordinarily, this would have offered a supreme occasion to ridicule Karen; I was distracted, however. Among the pill bottles on the nightstand was a large fountain cup, no top, brown soda beads clinging to its waxed interior. Held down by the fountain cup was a handwritten note.

"Papadopoulos," Karen said.

She'd managed to kind of calm the bed and was bobbing gently beside the man. I opened the drug box, prepared a bolus of naloxone, inserted the needle, and drove home the plunger. The action was almost instantaneous. While we were still trying to bounce him onto the backboard, the man began to gag on the airway and slap at the oxygen



"I hate to be that guy, but, technically, Frankenstein is the name of my creator, and I'm Frankenstein's monster."

mask strapped to his face. By the time we'd transferred him to the stretcher, he was back in the world and not the least pleased.

"Why'd you do that?" he asked us.

"Oh, fuck you, Marty, you fucking shithead," the woman said, quietly, and left the room.

I rewarded the man with another hit of naloxone, which made him even more alive, even less happy. Karen was busy with the gear, and I thought for sure that the coast was clear. It wasn't. As soon as I put the note in my pocket, I saw the boy. He stood in the doorway, watching me with a basically impassive expression. He chewed his gum. He blew a splendid bubble.

"Let's move," Karen said, and the boy mutely watched us wheel his sort-of dad away.

The note was all run-of-the-mill, derivative material. A lot of I love you so much, a lot of I'm so sorry. Still, after that day I carried it with me everywhere.

If I drank too much, I'd sometimes knock over the I.V. stand during the night, inverting my gravitational relationship to the bag of saline. In the morning I'd find it jiggling on the floor, still hooked to my arm, full of my fluid. I'd raise the bag above my head and squeeze it in my fist until the whole pink cocktail drained back down the tubing, into me, where it belonged. I'd yank the catheter from my vein, sit up on my cot, stumble past the floor-to-ceiling shelves stocked with medical miscellany, enter the combination on the drug cabinet, and open her up. Typically, what I required was a vasodilator/muscle-relaxer medley: the former to stimulate cranial blood flow, the latter to break the grip of the savage claws sunk into my face, determined to unmask my skull.

Often, I'd cough. If so, I'd scour the shelves for something to spit into—a bandage or some gauze or a sterile eye pad would do. I'd inspect the sample, a squashed bug on the white cotton, with satisfaction. I'd seal it in a biohazard bag. I'd write the date.

One morning, the supply-closet door opened and Captain Finkbiner walked in. I gulped the pills in my palm, then turned to face him. He glared at me,

Finkbiner, in his manner. He appeared to subscribe to the theory that if you wanted to unnerve a man you didn't look him in the eye, you did the opposite: avoid the eye by looking at his earlobe.

"Papaluffagus," he said.

I tried to say something respectful. One of the pills, however, had caught in my throat.

"No jokes, Clown?" Finkbiner asked.

"I was just doing inventory," I said.

"He was just doing inventory," Finkbiner said, addressing my earlobe as if it were a neutral party, sympathetic to his contempt for me.

Right then, First Sergeant Diaz joined us. He looked at me, looked at Finkbiner, looked back at me. He said, "Did you finish that inventory?"

It was Saturday, a drill weekend. Soldiers were trickling in from Brooklyn, Harlem, Queens, the Bronx. I folded up my cot and gathered the medical platoon in a dark corner of the armory, out of view of the grunts. Nobody wanted to be there. Specialist Chen had brought a Box O'Joe from Dunkin' Donuts. We filled small paper cups and discussed the best way for me to dislodge the tablet from my esophagus. Sergeant Pavone seemed to have the most experience. A girl with whom he'd once engaged in unprotected sex had suffered the same problem with a morning-after pill. All day, Pavone had plied the girl with water and milk, hot tea, balled-up bread and honey. He'd massaged her neck, made her hop on one foot, held her upside down, commanded her to yodel.

"So what worked?" I said.

"Nothing."

"So what happened to her?"

"Who?"

"The girl."

"The girl with the pill?"

"Yes."

Pavone shrugged and sipped his coffee.

It was peacetime, more or less. At 1300, we had a domestic-abuse-prevention training. At 1500, we had a driving-under-the-influence-prevention training. At 1700, we had a suicide-and-self-harm-prevention training.

"Look like you're doing something," I instructed the platoon before heading to the bodega for milk.

"Like what?" Specialist Chen asked. "Training."

When I got back, they were working on Harvey, our Human Patient Simulator, a computerized mannequin that had a heartbeat, blinked, and breathed. One of the new privates, an outdoorsy type from Long Island, was struggling to perform a needle-chest decompression. At last, Harvey's torso ceased to inflate. The private tried to make light. No one laughed. Instead, Sergeant Pavone articulated the elbow hinge and pressed two fingers to Harvey's wrist, feeling for whatever widget was supposed to throb.

Karen had aced the civil-service exam, securing a spot at the police academy. Now, whenever we entered a crime scene, she sized up the place, noting suspicious blood trails, signs of struggle. One day, law enforcement received complaints of a man head-butting concrete walls in an alley. When Karen and I got there, we found an emotionally disturbed person keeping two officers at bay with sharp, deft karate kicks. He was well turned out for an E.D.P. He wore a tasteful suit, an understated tie, polished wingtips; every time he brandished a foot at one of the cops his pant leg hiked up, exposing colorful striped socks. The only sign of emotional disturbance was a purple hematoma from his hairline to his eyebrows.

"What do we got?" Karen asked, employing one of her new favorite "Law & Order" lines.

"Guy versus wall."

Karen nodded. She was still nodding when the E.D.P., with remarkable athleticism, fainted right, rolled left, and sprinted by us, up the alley.

We got the next call twenty minutes later. The cops had pursued the man into a residential neighborhood, where he'd bounded through the unlocked door of a brick-and-vinyl-sided duplex. Seemed he'd made for the kitchen, extracted a chef's knife from a heap of dirty dishes in the sink, and slit his throat. By the time we arrived, so much blood had pooled on the linoleum that I could see my dark reflection peering up at me, Karen's peering up at her. The E.D.P. had very nearly decapitated himself, transecting both

jugulars and the trachea. The cops were crouching on either side of him, pressing red dishrags to his neck. Their sleeves were sopping. They looked relieved to see us.

I kneeled above the man's head, intubated him straight through the laceration in his windpipe, connected a bag-valve to the tube, and told one of the cops to squeeze it each time he took a breath himself. By then, Karen was ready with the dressings; when we tipped the man onto his side, however, a bucket's worth of blood dumped out. I mean enough blood to make a splash. It looked like we'd exsanguinated a pig or two. I glanced up, searching for a towel, or a fire hose, I guess, and then I saw them: a young man and woman sitting in the dining room.

The dining room met the kitchen via a wide, arched doorway, and the doorway neatly framed the couple, who sat across from each other at a square table. In front of each was a wineglass with ice water, and a plate of greens. Beige napkins lay across their laps. A cube-shaped candle glowed on a ceramic plate. I noticed now the pleasant sound of jazz piano issuing from a stereo.

Both the man and the woman held rigid attitudes of astonishment. The woman had brought her hand to her mouth; the man had turned slightly in his chair. It was as if, by running into their house, grabbing their knife, and murdering himself, the E.D.P. had bewitched the couple. I felt pity and a kind of kinship. That might as well have been me in there, transfixed; it might as well have been my wife.

The look on their faces.

It made me want to warn them.

A few evenings later, at a bar on Third Avenue, First Sergeant Diaz said, "By the way, did you mail a biohazard bag full of lung butter to the P.O. box for the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund?"

"What kind of a question is that?" I demanded.

Diaz sipped his beer. He waved. "Never trusted that outfit. Follow the money, right?"

Not long afterward, the supervisor accosted Karen and me in the garage. "Either of you two take a snow globe from

that house on Waring Ave.?" he asked.

Karen said nothing.

"A what?" I said.

"A snow globe."

"A snow globe?"

"Homeowners claim it's missing."

"Guy practically cuts his head off in their kitchen, they're worried about a snow globe?"

The supervisor shrugged, checked his watch. "I said I'd ask; I've asked." He walked away.

"Believe that?" I said.

Karen was gazing at me sadly. "You need help, Papadopoulos," she said. "I say that as your friend, your partner, and as a future law-enforcement officer."

I barely heard her. It was Wednesday—I was thinking about Mrs. Olenski, her cookies. Olenski, however, didn't call. She didn't call the next Wednesday, either, or the one after that. Finally, I suggested we stop by, and Karen, her investigative instincts eclipsing her dislike, allowed, "Something doesn't smell right."

Prescient words.

The stench reached into the hall. The TV was on. Through the walls, we could hear Rod Roddy inviting someone to come on down. Fire joined us. Police. When they jimmied the door, we found Mrs. Olenski rotting on the couch, remote control in her translucent hand.

While Karen chatted with the cops, musing on the possibility of foul play, I wandered down the hall, into the bedroom. The bed was elaborately made; against the headboard, lace pillows were stacked in order of descending size, from enormous to tiny. By the window, a long-handled shoehorn leaned against a wicker chair, and several pairs of what must have been Mr. Olenski's shoes, thick-soled loafers and white orthopedic sneakers, warmed near an electric heater. I went to the bureau and opened the drawers. I peeked in the bathroom. I checked the closet. Karen was calling. "Just a minute!" I shouted. What was I looking for? I was about to leave when I noticed, there on the nightstand, the dentures soaking in a glass of water.

Next drill weekend, Finkbiner was on the warpath. Seemed somebody had stolen his mandible. I corralled the platoon in the medical-supply closet and shut the door. "Get

comfortable," I told them. We sat on ammo boxes, cots, and totes, dozing and eating the everything bagels Specialist Chen had brought. At some point, the private from Long Island, the one who'd let Harvey die, asked Sergeant Pavone, "What's the worst, craziest, most fucked-up thing you ever saw?" And Sergeant Pavone (whose two best friends had been crossing a bridge when an R.P.G. engulfed their Humvee in flames and knocked it into the river—who, after learning that their skin had been charred and their lungs filled with water, had asked me, over and over, with a kind of awe, "Burned *and* drowned?") said, "Your mother's box."

I lay down on the floor and fell asleep. When I woke, it was to laughter. The private from Long Island had something in his hand. A set of teeth. The private was clacking them. When I sat up, the private aimed the teeth at me, clacked them, and barked. I must not have looked amused. The laughter stopped; Pavone cleared his throat. "Are they yours, Sergeant?" the private asked.

I lay back down. I went back to sleep.

My time at the armory was coming to an end. After the jawbone disappeared, Finkbiner bought a surveillance camera. He informed Diaz, who informed me, that it would be installed the following week.

The house where my wife lived, where we had lived together, was in Flushing, only two trains and a short bus ride away. I found Elijah, our neighbor, exactly as I'd left him: shoulder-deep in the engine of his Chevy, defiantly exhibiting his bottom. When he saw me, he straightened. "Back from the dead," he said, dragging two black palm prints across his tank top.

I waved and kept moving. When I got to our door, I was surprised to find it padlocked with a heavy steel latch. I lifted the mail slot and peered inside. Another surprise. All the furniture was gone, the living room completely empty. A few packing peanuts were scattered on the floor, like critter droppings.

Elijah was out on the sidewalk, a wrench in his hand, watching me. I walked back to him.

"Where'd she go?" I said.

"Arizona. Nevada. Someplace like that."

"Why?"

"Mike had another opportunity, a fellowship or grant or something." Elijah tapped his brow with the wrench. "Sharp, that Mike. A genius, if you ask me."

"Who's Mike?" I said.

"You know," Elijah said. "Mike."

I thought about that. "When'd they leave?"

"Four, five months ago?" Elijah cocked his head and squinted at me. "So, what, you get sent over there again? I thought we were done with all that."

"We are," I said.

Elijah nodded. "About time," he said. Then he frowned in a serious way and extended his greasy hand. I took it. "Welcome home," Elijah said.

It was Karen's last month on the bus, her last month as a paramedic. No, I was not happy for her. Every chance I got, I cut her leathers. "Did I ever tell you about Corporal Nevins?" I said. Corporal Nevins, like me, had joined the National Guard when it was still the National Guard: adult Boy Scouts, money for college, a reprieve from the city one weekend a month. On the last day of our last deployment, he was in the turret of an MRAP, climbing a small hill to bid farewell to the Afghan Army soldiers who manned the outpost on top. A high-voltage, low-hanging electrical wire caught Nevins right between his flak and his Kevlar, right where it could kill him.

"Just saying," I told Karen.

She smiled. You couldn't nick her with a chain saw. "I've heard that one," she said. "Only he wasn't a corporal. And his name wasn't Nevins. And there were no Afghan soldiers. And it wasn't a wire."

A few days before her final shift, they sent us to the projects. I recognized the building and the apartment number instantly. It was the small man: that fucking shithhead, Marty.

Once again, the boy in the hoodie met us outside the lobby, and once again the obese woman wearily led us to the bedroom. She wore the same bathrobe as before, and the same nightgown—but her sweatsuit, this time, was purplish, not brownish. Little

else had changed. The action on the TV continued; the children glowed on.

As I injected the man with yet another bolus of naloxone, I looked at the boy in the hoodie. He chewed his gum, blew his bubbles, and said nothing.

En route to the hospital, I sat beside the man, monitoring his vitals. "Why'd you do that?" he kept asking. "Why'd you have to go and do that?"

After we delivered him, I changed the sheets on the stretcher and got a fresh backboard from the locker in the ambulance bay. I took out my wallet. I felt the note. I rubbed the paper between my thumb and finger. I brought the paper out. I smelled it. I unfolded it. I

was just about to read it—I don't know, I wanted to read it—when Karen, wide-eyed, hopped down from the back of the bus.

"Where's the drug box?" she said.

Not until we were racing back to Ridgedale did the full magnitude of my blunder begin to impress itself on me. There were enough narcotics in that box to put a family down. There were nerve agents, paralytic agents, anti-arrhythmic agents. There were vials of pure adrenaline, sedatives, steroids, Valium, and anesthetics.

"That boy," I said. "I was distracted."

Karen switched on the lights and the siren. She clenched her teeth. It looked like a mini tachycardic heart was pounding in her cheek. "My last month," she said.

When we got there, Karen stayed in the bus while I ran inside. The sweat-suited woman crossed her arms and clucked while I searched the bedroom. "You people," she commented. The box wasn't there.

When I asked her where her son was, the woman scowled and reared back, as if from a bee.

Karen was waiting in the lobby.

"I'm calling it in," she said.

"Nobody's calling anybody," I said.

I walked outside. The light was dimming, and the lamps, in anticipation, were on. I followed a footpath, distended by shallow tree roots, around the cor-

ner. In the lamp-and-evening light I saw a small playground: a metal climbing structure and a swing set anchored to a concrete pad. A group of teen-agers were gathered by the swings. They were huddled close together, convening over something. I approached with caution.

Before I got very near, one of them noticed me and alerted the others.

There was some jostling—some hurried consultation—and then, all at once, they scattered. I saw, I thought I saw, a boy carrying something under his arm. I pursued him. We ran through the warren of brick apartment buildings, past more playgrounds, across a basketball court, across a parking lot, down a street, and then back into the warren,

back to the first playground, it seemed, though maybe not. I had lost sight of him. I leaned against a lamppost and hacked up beautiful black samples. In the distance, a dark figure flitted by the window of a lobby. I jogged there. Beside the elevator, a door led to a stairwell; when I opened it, I heard footsteps and followed them up the stairs. I was so tired. I kept having to pause, slump against the wall, cough. At some point, I realized that the footsteps had stopped. I opened a door, looked both ways down a hall. It was empty. I did the same on the next floor, and the next. Empty, empty. I reached the top. "Alarm Will Sound," the sign said. I pushed and nothing happened. I was on the roof.

It was dark out. It was not evening anymore. How long had I been chasing the boy? I looked at my watch. Our shift was already over—it had been over for some time. I walked to the edge of the roof. Far away, on the opposite side of the projects, I saw the blue-and-red lights of squad cars, the white beams of flashlights sweeping bushes and dumpsters. Beyond that was the river, a slick of oil in a phosphorescent sea. And beyond that?

Somewhere someone was calling my name. ♦



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Luke Mogelson on "Peacetime."

THE CRITICS



THE ART WORLD

NEW YORK ODYSSEY

The Whitney reestablishes itself downtown.

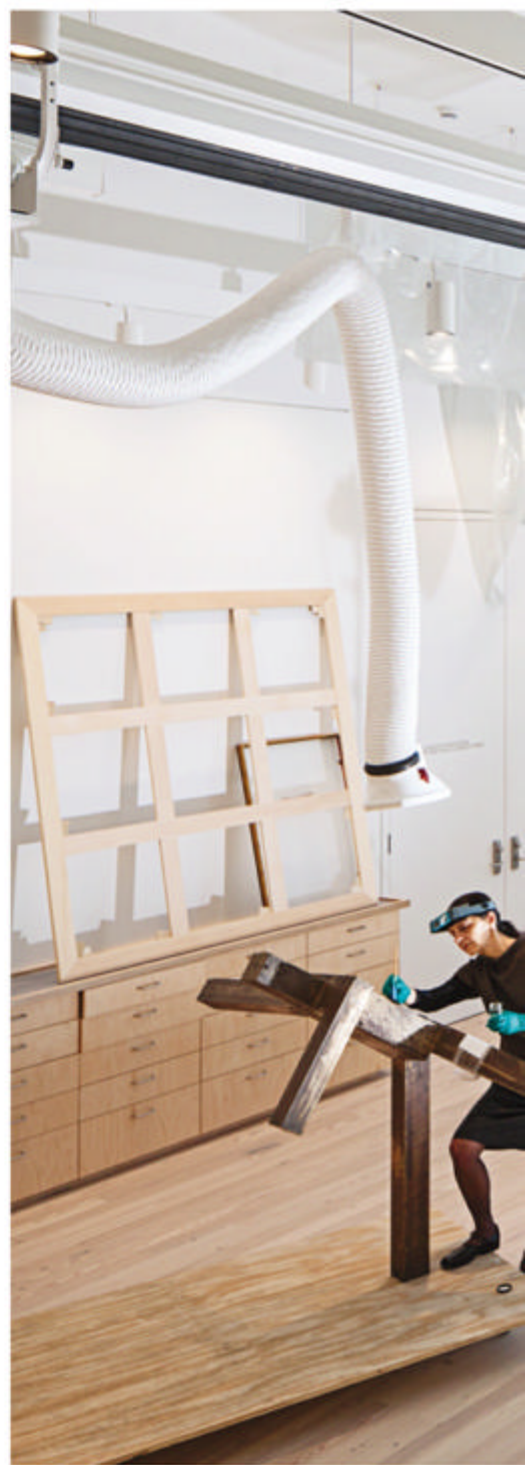
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The Whitney Museum of American Art, long the odd duck among the Big Four of Manhattan art museums—a cohort that includes the mighty Metropolitan, the starry Modern, and the raffish Guggenheim—takes wing on May 1st, when it reopens in a new, vastly expanded headquarters downtown. The fledgling owes a lot to the Italian architect Renzo Piano's ingenious building, on Gansevoort Street, which features six floors of shapely galleries, four open-air terraces, spaces for performance and screening, a library and reading rooms, a restaurant, a café, and an over-all feeling of seductive amenity—a bar on the piazza-like ground floor bodes to be one of the toniest trysting spots in town. It is likely to win far more fans than the Whitney's old home, Marcel Breuer's brutalist “inverted ziggurat,” which opened in 1966, on Madison Avenue, and which it vacated six months ago and leased to the Met. Piano's museum stands at the southern end of the High Line and hard by the Hudson River, in what remains of the tatterdemalion meatpacking district. It looms like a mother ship for both gallery-jammed Chelsea, to the north, and the pattering West Village, to the south. It is instantly a landmark on the cultural and social maps of the city—and on its poetic map, as a site to germinate memories.

But the most compelling change is a refurbished sense of mission for the eighty-four-year-old institution, signalled by the inaugural show, of six

hundred and fifty works from the permanent collection, titled “America Is Hard to See.” The timing couldn't be better for a detailed and vividly embodied engagement with the question of what has been meant by “American” modern art. The Whitney's parochial mandate seemed a handicap during the past century of marching cosmopolitan styles, from Post-Impressionism and Cubism to minimalism and the myriad variants of conceptual art. Nationalism was then a bugaboo. But the restriction becomes a strength as, day after day in the headlines, one dream after another of a borderless world flames out. A national perspective offers a sturdy point of reference amid the redundancies of the nowhere-in-particular globalized culture.

Donna De Salvo, the Whitney's chief curator since 2006, told me, “Our nimble spirit comes from our close working relationship with artists.” We stood outside her seventh-floor office, facing one of the building's magnificent waterfront views. De Salvo is a veteran of museum work. She has been an adventurous curator at the Dia Art Foundation and, from 2000 to 2004, at London's Tate Modern. Her comment jibed with my longtime sense of the Whitney as something like the big museum in a small city where all the people involved with art know one another. Partly, this reflects the history of the collection. Its beginnings were genteel-bohemian, with several hundred contemporary American works



The conservation room in the Whitney's new

that belonged to the energetic heiress, sculptor, and saloniste Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. A passionate soul, Whitney, married to the businessman and horse breeder Harry Payne Whitney, chafed at the constraints of her caste. At the age of nineteen, she complained in her journal that “a man chooses the path that gives him the most thrill. That is what I want.” Art offered an escape from what she called “the big

ABOVE: FRANÇOIS AVRIL



building, designed by Renzo Piano, who worked from “the logic of the force of necessity” to fulfill the needs of the curators and the staff.

stagnation of riches,” as an avenue for both patronage and creativity; her own comic 1941 bronze of Peter Stuyvesant, in Stuyvesant Square, is a gem of public art.

In 1930, Whitney had offered her collection, which included many works by John Sloan, George Bellows, and other Ashcan School painters, and by the sterling modernists Marsden Hartley, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Stuart

Davis, to the Metropolitan Museum. But the director, Edward Robinson, who was both averse to modern art and contemptuous of its American proponents, spurned it. Juliana Force, Whitney’s emissary, reported that he told her, “What will we do with them, dear lady? We have a cellar full of those things already.” She stormed out of his office without having conveyed Whitney’s offer of five million dollars

for a new wing to house the works.

Whitney decided to open her own museum, on West Eighth Street, in 1931, and appointed Force its director. Since then, seven directors have overseen the growth of the collection, which now contains twenty-two thousand items, seventeen thousand of them works on paper. There are such touchstones as Alexander Calder’s “Circus” (1926-31), Arshile Gorky’s “The Artist and His Mother”

(1926-36), Jasper Johns's "Three Flags" (1958), Jay DeFeo's massive relief "The Rose" (1958-66), Willem de Kooning's "Door to the River" (1960), Nan Goldin's slide-show installation "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency" (1979-96), and Mike Kelley's caustic stuffed-animal array "More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid" (1987). But the collection lacks depth in most major artists, with the important exception of Edward Hopper. The Whitney has the largest concentration of his art anywhere, including such paintings as "Railroad Sunset" (1929) and the storefront epiphany "Early Sunday Morning" (1930), along with more than twenty-five hundred drawings. By ever more general agreement, Hopper is this country's painter laureate, or, as De Salvo calls him, "our Picasso."

At unfortunate points in its history, the museum, intent on a contemporary focus, sold off its holdings in nineteenth-century art and folk art. It has no design collection, and it is still playing catchup in its departments of photography and film. But, as a whole, the collection, which tracks often relatively unfamiliar phases of twentieth-century art history, like the socially conscious work of the nineteen-thirties, tells a picaresque story of New York's living, working art world since the First World War: its movements and coteries, its aesthetic and social upheavals, its fashions and follies.

The Whitney's Manhattan-centrism assumes a symbolic mien on the outside of its new quarters. The building is a lurching aggregate of shapes in striated steel cladding and glass, with

outdoor stairways that connect terraces on three floors. It's so confusing that, pretty soon, I gave up looking at it. The jumble doesn't displease Piano, the go-to architect for museums. Counting his initial, revolutionary (to a hectic fault) design of the Pompidou Center, in Paris, which opened in 1977, he has worked on twenty-four museums, thirteen of them in the United States. These include expansions to the Art Institute of Chicago, New York's Morgan Library, and the Kimbell, in Fort Worth; and at least one masterpiece, the magically daylight-modulating Menil Collection, in Houston. The Whitney's trustees interviewed several other potential architects for the new building, asking each to name a favorite museum. According to Stephen Soba, the Whitney's director of communications, they all named the Menil. That clinched the choice.

I met Piano in his offices, on Washington Street, around the corner from the new building. At the age of seventy-seven, he is dapper and brisk—at one point, he called himself "an old man," although he can't possibly feel like one. I asked why he had chosen to design so many museums. He thought for a moment, then said, "For some funny reason, nothing is more different than museums." He described a five-year design process for the Whitney, during which, accepting "the logic of the force of necessity," he sought to fulfill the wishes of the curators and the staff. Previously, the conservation, photographic, digital, art-handling, and storage departments, among others, were crowded into nooks of the Breuer building, scattered to outlying sites, or, in the case of

a theatre for performances and lectures, nonexistent. The new building cost four hundred and twenty-two million dollars, and there's plenty of evidence of how it was spent in the capacious and state-of-the-art amenities, including advanced X-ray and infrared equipment and flood protection—a special concern post-Hurricane Sandy. Touring the premises, I met specialists in several departments who are well satisfied with the new quarters. Architecturally, the main element is a load-bearing "spine," which contains the elevator banks, and at once divides and connects the galleries, on the south side of the building, and the offices and facilities, on the north. In the result, form doesn't so much follow function as happily succumb to it.

But Piano expressed pride in the startling mismatch of the museum's eastern and western fronts. Smiling, he related the contrast to the spirit of Saul Steinberg's classic drawing, "View of the World from Ninth Avenue" (1976), the all-time signifier of a New Yorker's vague notion of whatever may distinguish the lands beyond the Hudson. On the east, the building congenially descends in tiers—"to bring down the scale," he said—toward the historic low-rise buildings of the neighborhood. The side that faces the river is "more massive, more strong," Piano said. A truncated-pyramid profile with jutting banks of large windows, it "talks to the rest of the world" from an attitude of confident majesty. Immodestly, but with proof in the product, the architect cited the elements that he had sought to incorporate in the design: "social life, urbanity, invention, construction, technology, poetry, light—an immense rich bouillabaisse."

The title of the opening show, "America Is Hard to See," is from a Robert Frost poem of 1951, which imagines Christopher Columbus's dismay at the look of the land that he assumed he had reached: "There had been something strangely wrong / With every coast he tried along. . . . He wasn't off a mere degree; / His reckoning was off a sea." The show is divided into twenty-three sections, representing epochs, sometimes brief, of prevalent ideas and styles, which visitors are invited to survey as that many disconcerting shores.



"My one-man band is breaking up."

The show starts enchantingly, in intimate ground-floor galleries—free to viewers, although they must pay twenty-two dollars for general admission—with exhibits from the Whitney Studio Club, which Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney started in Greenwich Village in 1914, on a modest scale, and expanded over the years.

In part, collecting fed what she called a “big wanting for little things,” and a group of small, stylized sculptures of animals, by folk and modern artists, impart a fondly domestic touch to the exhibition. Portraits of the willowy doyenne—an oil by Robert Henri and a photograph by Edward Steichen—accompany paintings by Sloan, George Luks (his 1918 panorama of a joyous city, “Armistice Night”), Hopper, Davis, and others, along with a canvas and satirical cartoons of New York society, high and low, by the artist, journalist, and man-about-town Guy Pène du Bois. The studio club provided artists with a warm and racy social scene and a chance to work from nude models, something that was rare at the time. Thirteen life studies by Hopper evince an ability that, in the pictorial dramas of his mature style, he downplayed to the point of concealing it.

Adam Weinberg, who has been the museum’s director since 2003, told me that he sees the show as “a history of the Whitney’s psyche,” keyed to an “art-choke theory” of peeling back “layers of contradictions and complexities.” Each section is named for a work in it, creating an over-all effect that is alternately descriptive, interpretative, and fanciful. The rubrics emerged in brainstorming by curators—led by De Salvo and including Scott Rothkopf, Dana Miller, and Carter Foster—who worked as a team on nearly every aspect of the selection and the installation. “Abstracted Forms,” “Breaking the Prairie,” and “Fighting with All Our Might” are a few of the groupings that cover trends of the twenties and thirties. “New York, NY, 1955,” a gallery of triumphant Abstract Expressionist works by, among others, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Franz Kline, takes its name from a jolting air-brushed painting of architectonic forms by the little-known Hedda Sterne—the only woman in the famous *Life* photograph,

from 1952, of the movement’s leaders. (The curators have taken care to include neglected but fully worthy female and minority artists.) Pop art arrives with “Large Trademark,” which surveys the usual canon of Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, et al., but is unexpectedly augmented with works that are at once heterodox and apposite for the period, such as Alex Katz’s billboard-bright portrait of his wife, Ada, “The Red Smile” (1963); Vija Celmins’s “Heater” (1964), depicting a portable space heater glowing orange against a ground of subtle grays; and my favorite Photo-Realist painting, Robert Bechtle’s “’61 Pontiac” (1968–69), from a snapshot of an ordinary-seeming suburban family that happened to be his own.

“Rational Irrationalism” amounts to a provocative—and boldly illuminating—two-word critical essay on minimalist and post-minimalist art. (Minimalism’s sleek rectitude always had a touch of the wacky at its spiritual core.) “Raw War” gathers protest art from the Vietnam era, and “Love Letter from the War Front” memorializes the AIDS crisis. The turn to self-contemplation, in the seventies, by artists ranging from Chris Burden to Cindy Sherman, is billed “Learn Where the Meat Comes From.” The final section, “Course of Empire,” zooms in on the joys, sorrows, and contentions of post-9/11 America. It is followed by “Get Rid of Yourself,” a looping program of videos and films that track the prevalence of those mediums in new art, starting with Jack Smith’s bacchanalian “Flaming Creatures” (1962–1963) and featuring the first major work of the wunderkind Ryan Trecartin, “A Family Finds Entertainment” (2004).

If such labelling sounds pushy, it is. But first-rate works stand out for their timeless qualities and easily slip the bonds of their classification, while lesser ones provide grace notes and variations on the dominant themes. Seeing, thinking, and evaluating proceed in harness. People will revisit and debate the show until it closes, in September. After that, the concerted seriousness of the Whitney’s curatorial team—which includes, notably, Jay Sanders, an expert in performance art—promises a routine of challenges to viewers’ intelligence and sensitivity. Don’t expect populist



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cheese like the Museum of Modern Art's current Björk show. Tourists will be welcomed but not stroked.

Some sections relate specifically to places west of the Hudson. Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Andrew Wyeth receive their due—looking far better to me than they used to, as the old rancorously competing narratives of the cosmopolitan and the native fade into history. (The long-denigrated Curry's rustic El Greco pastiche, "Baptism in Kansas," from 1928, springs to life.) The rise of the Northern and Southern California avant-gardes in the fifties and sixties registers strongly; Los Angeles's Ed Ruscha figures prominently in two of the sections, bolstering his reputation as, after Warhol, perhaps the most influential American artist of the past half century. Artists of Chicago weigh in, though skimpily, but the show skews to the museum's tradition of channelling New York sensibilities.

Although the Whitney moved out of the Village, first to West Fifty-fourth Street, in 1954, and then to the Upper East Side, it stayed umbilically related to downtown studio society. Since the sixties, its share in the general professionalizing of museums by university-trained specialist curators has attenuated the link but not broken it. The Whitney Biennials, the springtime roundups of recent work—which, between 1937 and 1973, were Annuals—set the tone and suggest agendas for the local scene. They draw inevitable complaints of anguish and disdain from excluded artists, while testy critics reliably level charges of pandering, when the selection is trendy; tendentiousness, when it is thematic; or incoherence, when it is neither of the above.

My usual tolerance failed me at the notoriously polemical 1993 Biennial, at which the artist Daniel Martinez handed out buttons that read "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white." But I was wrong. The show responsibly defined a generational wave of artists affected by the Reagan-era culture wars, AIDS, and the heady allure of the new critical theory—poststructuralism, deconstruction—taught in universities. It spotlighted such formidable talents as Robert Gober, Charles Ray, Kiki Smith, Sue Williams, Matthew Barney, Glenn Ligon, and

Lorna Simpson. The Biennials give discursive edge and a buzz of erotic festivity to the changing scene. My one undying complaint is that the Biennials are no longer Annuals. Every spring, in my utopia, daffodils sprout and people go to the Whitney. Today, only the heartless money traps known as art fairs address the primitive yen for yearly ritual. Two-year gaps put undue pressure to succeed on each show (as it is, the next Biennial will not be until 2017). Like a losing baseball team, the occasional stinker should bring to mind the soothing incantation "Wait till next year."

Long ago, New York's galleries clustered near its chief museums: along Madison Avenue, before the Whitney got there, in the case of the Met; and on or near Fifty-seventh Street, close to MOMA. That changed in the early seventies, when dealers flocked to SoHo, where the time's signal artists lived and hung out. An abundance of cheap convertible spaces motivated the subsequent efflorescence of Chelsea. A similar if scruffier logic has driven the proliferation of mostly tiny galleries on the Lower East Side, a scene that has found a hub in the lively, internationalist New Museum, on the Bowery—a Kunsthalle without a significant collection. The Whitney's arrival at the foot of Chelsea, as an institution anchoring the art world's primary commercial precinct of the moment, brings an echo of the old days. Just last week, it got a foretaste of what might beset it in the political culture of the neighborhood, when anti-fracking activists made it the locus for a street-theatre protest against a nearby underground natural-gas pipeline.

The relocated museum makes me surprisingly hopeful for the near future of art in New York. The new Whitney won't do anything to ameliorate the crisis brought about by the crushing cost of living, which exiles young artists, writers, and other creative types to increasingly distant parts of the city, if not out of it altogether. (The museum will actually worsen the problem in its immediate vicinity, near the High Line.) Still, as long as the subways run, the Whitney will serve and fortify the shared experience and conversation of people who care about the roots and the contemporary branches of art that can't help but be American. ♦

MAD SCENES

Pascal Dusapin's "Penthesilea," at La Monnaie, in Brussels.

BY ALEX ROSS

The Kingdom of Belgium is the only nation on earth that came into being after a night at the opera. In the summer of 1830, Daniel Auber's "La Muette de Portici"—a flamboyant melodrama first heard in Paris, two years earlier—received a series of performances at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, the venerable opera house

A new coalition government was formed last fall, and it included the New Flemish Alliance, a center-right party with separatist aims, a free-market agenda, and a tendency toward mild anti-immigrant rhetoric. Within days, La Monnaie, which is subsidized by the state, had been told to cut its operating expenses by twenty per cent, and

music world has long looked to it for inspiration. Connoisseurs and tourists alike fill its seats nightly. In Brussels, the de-facto capital of the European Union, the opera stands as a symbol of cosmopolitan culture, and its fate foretells the destiny of the larger order.

Despite the budget crisis, La Monnaie seems determined to maintain its lustrous reputation. In the nineteen-eighties, it prospered under the leadership of the late Gerard Mortier, a Flemish-born administrator with a flair for provocation. Mortier brought Morris to the house and, in 1991, presented the première of John Adams's "The Death of Klinghoffer." When Mortier moved on to Salzburg, he



In Dusapin's opera, Penthesilea, the queen of the Amazons, sets upon Achilles with dogs and rips him apart.

of Brussels. The Belgian territories were then under Dutch rule, and the revolutionary overtones of Auber's opera, which depicts a peasant revolt in seventeenth-century Naples, became associated with local aspirations toward independence. One night, the duet "Amour sacré de la patrie" ("Sacred love of country," a line taken from the "Marseillaise") set off a riot both inside and outside the theatre, and the Belgian Revolution began.

In contemporary Belgium, the historic union of Flanders and Wallonia has recently experienced internal tension that could eventually lead to a partition of the Dutch- and French-speaking territories; perhaps not coincidentally, La Monnaie has come under fire.

as a result it had to reduce its schedule, causing particular damage to its historically strong dance programming. (Mark Morris's "L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato" had its première at La Monnaie, in 1988.) For the separatists, La Monnaie and other cultural institutions in Brussels symbolize federalism, and to weaken them is to weaken the Belgian state.

The political calculation is clear: across Europe, parties on both the right and the left are targeting subsidies in the name of populism and austerity. In the long term, though, no one has much to gain from the diminution of storied institutions. La Monnaie is not only one of Europe's finest companies but also one of its most progressive, and the

was replaced by Bernard Foccroulle, a French-speaking Belgian, who deepened La Monnaie's commitment to new music and also hosted trendsetting productions of Baroque opera. And when Foccroulle left for the Aix-en-Provence Festival, in 2007, he handed the reins to Peter de Caluwe, another Fleming, who has featured at least one new opera a year, sometimes several.

The novelty this spring was "Penthesilea," by the fifty-nine-year-old French composer Pascal Dusapin—a formidable, hard-to-classify figure who has drawn on both the convulsive avant-gardism of Iannis Xenakis and the brooding late Romanticism of Sibelius. Dusapin has a close association with La Monnaie; his second opera, a

Baroque-tinged monodrama called “Medeamaterial,” had its première there, in 1992, with the great Belgian conductor Philippe Herreweghe presiding. Dusapin, a devotee of German culture, had long been playing with the idea of adapting Heinrich von Kleist’s 1808 verse play, “Penthesilea,” a chaotic, lurid masterpiece of German Romanticism. Dusapin co-wrote the libretto with the Berlin-based playwright Beate Haeckl.

In Greek legend, Penthesilea is the Amazon queen who fights Achilles at Troy. When she is killed by his sword, he is bewitched by the beauty of her corpse. Kleist radically revised the story, making Achilles not the victor but the victim. Penthesilea is torn between her love for Achilles and the warrior code that requires her to conquer him. She can resolve the contradiction only through an act of extreme violence. Setting upon Achilles with dogs, Penthesilea rips him to pieces, and, having done so, delivers one of the more scandalous lines in German literature: “Kissing, biting / It rhymes (*Küsse, bisse*), and anyone who truly loves from the heart / May take one for the other.” She then kills herself by plunging a dagger into her breast—a dagger that, Kleist says, has somehow been forged from the “cold ore” of her emotions.

Dusapin approaches the material with admirable restraint; the tone of the opera, which unfolds in an unbroken ninety minutes, is grave and meditative, with chantlike lines rising over extended drones and impressionistic washes of timbre. It begins with a lonely modal melody for harp, which is gradually blotted out by a spreading smear of sound in the lower strings and brass. An array of antique instruments—a cimbalom, a type of hammered dulcimer; a sistrum, or sacred Egyptian rattle; various drums and gongs—provide an archaic sonic patina. Although Dusapin occasionally unleashes a Dionysian frenzy in the full orchestra, for the most part the musical action proceeds at a ritual distance. It is a masterly work, yet it is perhaps too coolly controlled for a subject as unhinged as Kleist’s.

The staging is by the veteran French-Lebanese director Pierre Audi, with sets by the Belgian sculptor Berlinde De Bruyckere. The daughter of a butcher, De Bruyckere often evokes damaged

and destroyed organic forms—trees, horses, cows, people—and her design for “Penthesilea” simulates the interior of an abattoir; the dominant image is of skins stacked on a pallet. After reading the advance publicity, I was prepared for visceral horror, but Audi and De Bruyckere keep the gore out of sight, creating instead an atmosphere of veiled menace. Evidently, we are meant to equate Penthesilea’s slaughter with the animal trade, although the allegory remains oblique. Like the score, the production seems to be missing some climactic coup de théâtre.

The opening-night performance was vital and exact, with Natascha Petrinsky displaying a molten mezzo voice in the title role and Georg Nigl giving a thuggish thrust to Achilles. Franck Ollu led confidently in the pit. At the curtain call, Dusapin, a gangly man with a shaggy mane of hair, threw his bouquet into the orchestra, recognizing the ultimate source of his music’s smoldering power.

In the Low Countries, the roots of the classical tradition go deep. Renaissance composers of the Franco-Flemish School—including Dufay, Ockeghem, Isaac, Willaert, and Lassus, all of whom seem to have been born within Belgium’s present borders—perfected the art of sacred polyphony, creating works that were large in scale and intricate in design. Building on ideas from England and France, they might be said to have inaugurated composing in the grand manner, setting the stage not only for the masses and passions of Bach but also for the symphonies of Beethoven—who, natives will remind you, was partially of Flemish descent.

In 1970, Herreweghe, a medical student turned choral conductor, founded the Collegium Vocale Gent, which has become one of the world’s supreme early-music groups. Herreweghe’s repertory stretches from the Franco-Flemish masters to Dusapin and other contemporaries, with Bach at the center. After the “Penthesilea” première, I went to Gent to see the Collegium Vocale on its home turf, presenting Bach’s St. John Passion. As with other Herreweghe concerts that are burned into my brain—the St. Matthew Passion, in 2004 and 2012, and the Mass in B Minor, in 2009,

all at Alice Tully Hall—the performance had an astonishing, somewhat inexplicable force. At the start, the music-making seemed straightforward, even sedate, with naturalness of phrasing favored over expressive bite. “He’s not doing much,” I said to myself, as the conductor’s hands fluttered through the monumental opening chorus, “Herr, unser Herrscher.” An hour in, I was telling myself, “He has done so much.” The intensification had come through an accumulation of pinpoint gestures: a holding back of the tempo here, a quickening of the pulse there, an increasing weight given to the bass lines in the orchestra, a heightened desperation in the vocal solos. By the end, a towering, enshrouding structure had arisen.

The Collegium Vocale’s funding has remained relatively stable, yet I was surprised to find that this internationally celebrated ensemble has no dedicated space for rehearsals. Herreweghe’s musicians are scattered all over, and preparatory work is done in whatever place is convenient for the start of a tour. Furthermore, its main venue in Gent, the De Bijloke Music Centre, is problematic. Formerly the hospital ward of a thirteenth-century monastery, the hall is a feast for the eyes, but the acoustics are too dry for choral music, and require an amplification system. The sound lacked the rounded richness that the group has exhibited in its outings at Tully Hall and elsewhere.

All the same, it was a potent experience to hear the St. John Passion in the great medieval city of Gent, where the past is not only beautifully preserved but also bustling present, and integrated into modern life. Earlier in the day, I went to St. Bavo Cathedral to see the van Eyck brothers’ famous altarpiece, which dates from the same period as the early Franco-Flemish School. Composers and painters alike were discovering a new sense of space: in the same way that the van Eycks’ Lamb of God shines amid a lush, open landscape, the fixed melodies of Dufay and Ockeghem float through an ever-shifting polyphonic texture. In the lowlands, art became a second world, teeming with interior life. That undying tradition deserves more respect than contemporary politicians seem prepared to give it. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED



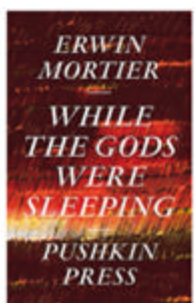
MICHELLE OBAMA, by Peter Slevin (*Knopf*). After Barack Obama was elected to the Illinois State Legislature, his wife warned him, "This business is not noble." Slevin argues that the question of how to make a difference while also having a good life has been a constant one for Michelle Obama—from her childhood, on the South Side of Chicago, to Princeton, Harvard, and her legal career. His book is better at explaining how she became the person who arrived at the White House than how she operates now. The Michelle who emerges fully understands the transformative value of being an African-American First Lady; she also has a conservative streak. When Barack, dawdling over proposing, would ask if marriage really mattered, she'd say, "Marriage is everything."



HANNIBAL, by Eve MacDonald (*Yale*). This taut study of the Carthaginian commander unfolds at the intersection of myth and history. Hannibal, described by Livy as "by far the best soldier" ever to set foot on a battlefield, acquired a reputation as Rome's most fearsome enemy. His invasion of Italy—tens of thousands of troops crossing the Alps—stunned the Romans. MacDonald argues that Roman historians magnified Hannibal's ferocity to add to the glory of Rome's eventual triumph. She paints him as a Hellenistic leader who built an army around strong personal ties. She also follows his myth through the ages, from Napoleon's determination to lead his own army over the Alps to Freud's fascination with Hannibal's strong-willed father.



AQUARIUM, by David Vann (*Atlantic*). This wrenching novel focusses on a lonely twelve-year-old girl's relationship with her emotionally disturbed mother. Caitlin spends her days at the Seattle aquarium, admiring the tranquillity of undersea creatures, while her single mother, Sheri, works a gruelling shift at the docks. Their fragile familial harmony shatters when Sheri's estranged father attempts to befriend Caitlin and indirectly revives a dark history of abuse. In bracing prose, Vann shows Caitlin's home becoming a claustrophobic prison, as much a glass tank as the ones that contain the fish she admires. "She had always been my safety," Caitlin reflects after one of Sheri's explosive incidents. "To have this place become unsafe left nowhere else."



WHILE THE GODS WERE SLEEPING, by Erwin Mortier, translated from the Dutch by Paul Vincent (*Pushkin Press*). Mortier, a Belgian novelist, has translated Virginia Woolf, and her vatic inventories of domestic life echo in his writing. His narrator, Helena, is an elderly witness to Europe's turbulent twentieth century. She describes horrific things she saw in the First World War's trenches but, a fierce aesthete, is unabashed by pleasures that she experienced close to the front. "The war was the best thing that ever happened to me," she confesses. Her hedonism earns her the scorn of her mother and her daughter. The novel's only false note is Helena's frequent apologies for rhapsodizing—it's clear that she needs to, and the book is the pearl that results from these shining accretions.

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THE PEOPLE YOU MEET

How a newspaperman from the South became New York's great chronicler.

BY CHARLES McGRATH



Joseph Mitchell (right) was drawn to lives on the margins of a vanishing world.

Thomas Kunkel's "Man in Profile: Joseph Mitchell of *The New Yorker*" (Random House) is a book about someone who may seem, except to longtime students of this magazine, an odd and unpromising subject for a full-length biography. Mitchell was a staff writer at *The New Yorker* from 1938 until his death, in 1996. He had a cultlike following, but for most of his life his books were hard to find, and he never became a household name the way that, say, James Thurber or E. B. White did. He was more esteemed by his peers—revered, it's not too much to say—than by the public: he was a writer's writer, or even a writer's writer's writer. You can still see unmistakable signs of his influence—blocks of foursquare declarative sentences, a patient layering of detail, passages of precisely rendered dialogue, a tone of quiet amusement—in current *New Yorker* writers like Alec Wilkinson, Mark Singer, and Ian Frazier.

Mitchell practiced what he called a "wild exactitude," and his style is hard to

describe except by extensive quotation. His writing is at once spare and leisurely, lyrical and precise, funny and a little mournful. He was always on the lookout for oddness, as in his famous description of the bearded lady known as Lady Olga:

Her thick, curly beard measures thirteen and a half inches, which is the longest it has ever been. When she was young and more entranced by life under canvas, she wore it differently every year; in those days there was a variety of style in beards—she remembers the Icicle, the Indian Fighter, the Whisk Broom, and the Billy Goat—and at the beginning of a season she would ask the circus barber to trim hers in the style most popular at the moment. Since it became gray, she has worn it in the untrimmed, House of David fashion.

And he was also capable of something close to poetry, especially when describing the Hudson River:

I like to look at it in midsummer, when it is warm and dirty and drowsy, and I like to look at it in January, when it is carrying ice. I like to look at it when it is stirred up, when a northeast wind is blowing and a strong tide is running—a new-moon tide or a full-moon tide—and I like to look at it when it is slack.

If he could help it, Mitchell never wrote about anyone who was famous or newsworthy. He was drawn to people on the margins: bearded ladies, Gypsies, street preachers, Bowery bums, Mohawk steelworkers, the fishmongers at the Fulton Market. In the nineteen-thirties and forties, *The New Yorker* couldn't get enough stories like this—barroom scenes were practically a subgenre—and Mitchell's work overlaps somewhat with that of A. J. Liebling, his best friend at the magazine, and of elbow-bending *New Yorker* writers like John McNulty. In general, Mitchell has aged far better than they have. McNulty's drunks no longer seem charming, and Liebling's Broadway hustlers and Tin Pan Alley hangers-on sometimes strain credulity. Liebling saw his people as "characters," and mined them for their colorfulness; Mitchell was genuinely interested in his subjects as human beings, remarkable because they so vividly demonstrate that one way or another we are all a little weird. But Mitchell's world was vanishing even as he wrote about it, and it now seems almost unimaginably distant from our own. Mitchell meant his stories to be lasting, and they are, but not quite in the way he intended. They resemble a bit the drawer pulls and pickle forks and electrical insulators he liked to collect: evocative, beautifully made artifacts from a bygone age.

Mitchell's personal life was unexceptional. He was happily married to the same woman for forty-nine years. He liked to take a drink—more so than Kunkel acknowledges—but drinking did not make him boastful or quarrelsome or self-pitying, the way it did so many writers of his generation. It just made him sadder and more nostalgic. Mitchell was shy, courtly, and private, even slightly paranoid. (Once, when I was a young *New Yorker* editor, he took me aside and said in a near-whisper, "I read something in the *Times* today. Don't tell anyone.") He dressed like a businessman—wing tips, white shirt, Brooks Brothers suit, fedora or, in summer, straw hat—and he kept businessman's hours, coming in at nine every day and leaving at six. He went into his office and shut the door and sat at his desk, and for thirty-two years, starting in 1964, he did this without publishing a word. In time, Mitchell became a cautionary figure, more

famous for not writing than for anything he actually wrote. At *The New Yorker*, people used to lurk outside his door listening for the sound of typing, and would scurry in when he left, looking for manuscript pages in the wastebasket. He would have hated to think so, but the mystery of his long silence adds an extra shine to what he did write, and it gives his biography shape and poignance.

Kunkel never quite solves the mystery. A former newspaper reporter and now a college president, he is the author of a solid biography of Harold Ross, the founder of *The New Yorker*, and he got to know and like Mitchell while researching it. The new book is careful, admiring, even adulatory—so uncritical that it sometimes diminishes its subject, draining the life from him. Kunkel doesn't go in for theorizing or speculation, and there's not a lot in his account—with one possible exception—that Mitchell fans didn't already know or guess. In many ways, as the title implies, Kunkel's Mitchell is a man captured in profile: an elusive figure still visible most clearly in his own writing.

Mitchell was born in Fairmont, North Carolina—farming country, on the coastal plain—in 1908. His father, Averette Nance, was a dour, humorless, self-made man who became a prosperous cotton and tobacco broker and one of the largest landowners in the area. “I very rarely feel altogether at ease with my father and haven't since I was a child,” Mitchell wrote when he was in his sixties. “He is still able to make an offhand remark and cut me to pieces.” If you wanted to psychologize—something that Kunkel generally avoids—Mitchell's relationship with his father would surely be the place to start.

Unlike his father, Mitchell's mother, Elizabeth, had been to college; she was also sweeter and kinder, and from her he developed an early love of reading. To his father's lasting disappointment, Mitchell had little desire to become a farmer, and, as a sort of fallback, he was sent to the University of North Carolina to study medicine. He was hopeless with numbers, which not only ruled out premed but made it impossible for him to get a regular degree. So for four years Mitchell stayed in Chapel Hill as a so-called “special student,” taking whatever courses he felt like, mostly literature and

journalism, and writing for not just the campus publications but some of the better North Carolina newspapers. In 1929, on the eve of the stock-market crash, he decided to move to New York and try his luck with the papers there. On hearing the news, his father looked at him sadly and said, “Son, is that the best you can do, sticking your nose into other people's business?”

New York in the nineteen-thirties was heaven for Mitchell. He quickly landed a job at the *Herald Tribune*, and began exploring the city on foot—all his life, he was a tireless walker—and by hanging out in the neighborhood police stations. A great noticer of things from boyhood, he became a careful listener as well, developing a matchless ear for New York speech. In 1931, Mitchell was fired from the *Trib* after flinging an inkwell at the publisher's wall in a drunken fit of temper, but after a stint as a deckhand on a freighter sailing to the Soviet Union he landed a job at the *World-Telegram*, then thought to be “the writer's paper.” He soon became such a star that his name was featured on the side of the delivery trucks. He covered the Lindbergh trial; did celebrity profiles of people like Bing Crosby, Noël Coward, and George Bernard Shaw; and brought particular care to stories about New York's oddballs—strippers, street preachers, voodoo worshippers. Many of these pieces were assembled in a 1938 collection called “My Ears Are Bent,” and they still sparkle. There were a lot of them, moreover. The writer who in later years had trouble finishing anything was sometimes turning out two or three features a day.

Mitchell was still prolific when he moved on to *The New Yorker*, in September, 1938. The slowdown was gradual, and can be explained mostly by the greater length of the stories he was able to do and by the care he was putting into them, cutting and pasting, writing and rewriting. He became a much more deliberate and consciously literary writer than most of his contemporaries at the magazine. The critic Stanley Edgar Hyman first pointed out that the people Mitchell wrote about more and more resembled himself: loners, depressives, nostalgists, haunters of the waterfront, cherishers of arcane information. The characters in his pieces began to share a similar voice;

they all sounded a little like Mitchell.

The self-identification became complete in Mitchell's most famous piece and, as it happens, the last one he published, “Joe Gould's Secret.” Joe Gould was a Village character who lived on handouts and was famous for doing seagull imitations at parties and for a multivolume compendium of conversations that he had supposedly overheard called the “Oral History of Our Time.” Mitchell published a mostly admiring and unskeptical profile of Gould in 1942, and returned to the subject in 1964 with a revisionist view. Gould was a fraud, he reveals, and the “Oral History” didn't exist except in a handful of pages that said the same thing over and over again. Then, in a startling about-face, Mitchell not only forgives Gould—on the ground that he probably thought he had the “History” all in his head and just needed to put it down on paper—but confesses that he is guilty of the same thing, having walked around for years with a great Joycean novel of New York in his own head, a book not quite written yet so vivid in his mind that he can practically see the title page. Years later, after Mitchell stopped publishing, the critic Norman Sims asked him why he found Gould so interesting. “Because he is me,” Mitchell replied.

After Mitchell's death, his fans, just like Salinger's, hoped that among his papers might be piles of publishable manuscripts. It now appears that there was no such trove. There were letters, notes, diaries, and false starts, but only two and half chapters of an uncompleted memoir (all of which have recently been published in *The New Yorker*). Yet Mitchell's drafts and notes allowed Kunkel to make some discoveries that may disturb and disappoint Mitchell admirers. More than we knew, or wanted to know, he made things up.

It's no secret that the character of Mr. Hugh G. Flood—an elderly, eccentric waterfront dweller who figures in three famous Mitchell stories—was a composite. Mitchell admitted this when the Flood stories were republished in book form, in 1948, though careful readers could have surmised as much on their own. There's the poetic name (which may be an allusion to Edwin Arlington Robinson's “Mr. Flood's Party”), the fact that

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Flood and Mitchell shared a birthday, and the fablelike quality of some of the scenes. According to Kunkel, though, there were other fabrications: the character of Cockeye Johnny Nikanov, the self-styled King of the Gypsies and the subject of a 1942 Profile so popular that Sidney Sheldon, of all people, wanted to base a musical on it, combined traits from several Gypsies Mitchell had known. (Because Mitchell wanted the rights to a Gypsy musical of his own, he told the magazine's lawyer, "Cockeye Johnny Nikanov does not exist in real life, and never did.") And in all likelihood Orvis Diabo, the central figure in a vivid and still revealing Mitchell piece about the Mohawks who worked in high steel, was also a construct.

Mitchell, it should be said, was not the only *New Yorker* writer in the thirties and forties to take liberties. Composites and invented figures were an old, if not honorable, journalistic tradition and a standby of newspaper feature writing. St. Clair McKelway, a *New Yorker* editor and writer who recruited Mitchell to the magazine, resorted to it, and, in some of his urban sketches, so did Liebling, barely bothering to disguise what he was up to. (His war reporting seems beyond reproach.) But this biography's most confounding revelation is that Harold Ross, a famously nitpicking literalist and stickler for accuracy—an early advocate of magazine fact-checking—was apparently not only aware of Mitchell's composites but encour-

aged him. It's as if Kunkel had caught Jonathan Edwards secretly winking at adultery.

Ross must also have known that Mitchell regularly doctored his quotes, stitching together bits of conversation into protracted monologues and sometimes switching chronology. This, too, careful readers could have guessed—no one really talks in paragraphs as long and eloquent as some of Mitchell's characters do—and Kunkel has found notes and revisions that prove it. As journalistic offenses go, fudging a quote is a far lesser offense than making up a character, and here again Mitchell was not alone at *The New Yorker* or elsewhere. Well into the era of Ross's successor, William Shawn, one of the magazine's hallmarks was long, unbroken quotations that now seem suspiciously articulate. Writers regularly transposed conversations, turning something said at lunch, say, into a remark made at dinner. The practice wasn't officially condoned, but some of the magazine's very best writers did it. There were even *New Yorker* writers who didn't take notes or use tape recorders but reconstructed (or reimagined) long quotations from memory. The subjects seldom, if ever, objected, because, even if they didn't recognize what they were quoted as saying, it usually sounded like something they might wish they had said.

Kunkel defends Mitchell's practice on the somewhat wobbly ground that it allows for a higher truthfulness, a

faithfulness that goes beyond mere factual accuracy. He also says that the results are more literary and artful than an untouched transcription might be, and in this he is certainly right. Mitchell's best work is lovely and stirring in a way that a documentary or a recorded interview could never be. George Hunter, an elderly black man and Staten Island resident, and the subject of a story that is probably Mitchell's masterpiece, would be less interesting if we had to read what he actually said. And yet the piece gains immeasurably from being presented as factual, an account of scenes and conversations that really took place. If we read it as fiction, which it is, in part, some of the air goes out.

As inglorious examples like Jayson Blair demonstrate, invention is often easier than reporting—you can do it without even leaving home—and requires no special talent other than nerve. But fabricators are now the exception; the rules of journalism have changed, and it's widely accepted—or ought to be—that what appears between quotation marks is a reasonably accurate representation of what someone has said at the time he or she is supposed to have said it. It's tempting to think that this represents a new scrupulousness and high-mindedness on the part of journalists. But it may be that more people don't try fabricating only because now, when we're more used to reading real speech (and when what people say is so easily picked up on smartphones and video cameras), it's harder to get away with. Mitchell's best defense is that he wrote what he did out of affection and empathy for his subjects, not a wish to deceive.

Mitchell appears to have felt uneasy about the composites, but to judge from Kunkel's account he saw nothing wrong with massaging his quotes. The most likely explanation for his block wasn't any sense of guilt but that he was a depressive by nature and became imprisoned by his own reputation—by the mythology that had grown up around him. The longer he went without producing anything, the more pressure he felt to come up with a masterpiece, and his standards by then had transcended those of mere magazine journalism.

In the late nineteen-eighties, I became Mitchell's editor at *The New Yorker*, a strictly nominal post by then. (I was interviewed by Kunkel, and am quoted a few times.) Once a year, Mitchell would report to my office and bring me up to date on what he was doing. In the beginning, as I recall, he talked about working on a memoir about his family and growing up in North Carolina. Then, in what seemed to me a shift in enthusiasm, he talked about his early newspapering days in New York, and in particular about his friendship with a woman named Ann Honeycutt. Honey, as she was called, really would make a great magazine piece. She was a funny, pretty, hard-drinking Louisiana-born blonde who became something like the collective girlfriend of a whole generation of *New Yorker* writers and editors. Wolcott Gibbs, Thurber, and Geoffrey Hellman were all in love with her at various times; McKelway married her, though only briefly; and Liebling and Mitchell couldn't get enough of her company. Whenever he spoke of her to me, Mitchell's spirits seemed to lift.

According to Kunkel, Mitchell's papers suggest that as early as the nineteen-seventies he was planning a large-scale autobiographical work that would toggle back and forth between North Carolina and New York, which is what the unfinished memoir does, though Honeycutt never makes an appearance. The existing chapters seem rather obsessive, circling around and around the same themes, and the last, incomplete section begins with an admission that Mitchell is now helplessly "living in the past." Something has also happened to the writing. It's mannered, self-conscious in a way that classic Mitchell never was, with the sentences growing longer and longer and more intricate. They feel like Penelope's web, woven to stave off an ending.

In Kunkel's telling, Mitchell's silence is sad, not tragic. Mitchell was clearly pained and embarrassed by his failure to finish anything, but he also made peace with it. Years after he stopped publishing, he even asked for a raise—believing, probably rightly, that he had been underpaid during the years when he was producing—and Shawn gave him one. Ultimately, what happened to Mitchell is an extreme version of what happens to most writers: your powers decline, the vision of what you want to attain becomes more and more distant, the words dry up or don't come out the way you want. In Mitchell's case, the diminuendo was especially long, and his continued expectations for himself much higher. But he never pitied himself, or expected anyone else to. Almost to the end, he kept hoping that inspiration might yet strike. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Liam Francis Walsh, must be received by Sunday, April 26th. The finalists in the April 13th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 11th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"This way we avoid the turnpike."
Louise Schiller, Oakland, Calif.



THE FINALISTS

"Miley's here."
Tyler Smith, New Haven, Conn.

"Why, yes, I am interested in homeowner's insurance."
Benjamin F. Remo, Easton, Md.

"Hold on, I heard a knock."
Bren Finan, Dublin, Ireland

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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